

**“THAT THE TRUTH OF THINGS MAY BE MORE FULLY KNOWN:”
UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF RHETORIC IN SHAPING, RESOLVING, AND
REMEMBERING THE SALEM WITCHCRAFT CRISIS**

A Dissertation

by

LAUREN ANN LEMLEY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2010

Major Subject: Communication

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ABSTRACT

“That the Truth of Things May Be More Fully Known:”

Understanding the Role of Rhetoric in Shaping, Resolving, and Remembering the Salem

Witchcraft Crisis. (May 2010)

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This project investigates how rhetorical texts influenced the witch trials that were held in Salem in 1691-1692, how rhetoric shaped the response to this event, and how rhetorical artifacts in the twentieth and twenty first centuries have shaped American public memory of the Salem witchcraft crisis. My analysis draws from three different chronological and rhetorical viewpoints. In Chapter II, I build upon work done by scholars such as McGee, White, and Charland in the area of constitutive rhetoric to address the question of how the witchcraft crisis was initiated and fueled rhetorically. Then, as my examination shifts to the rhetorical artifacts constructed immediately after the trials in Chapter III, I rely on the tradition of *apologia*, rooted in the ancient Greek understanding of stasis theory to understand how rhetorical elements were utilized by influential rhetors to craft a variety of different explanations for the crisis. And finally in Chapter IV, I draw from individuals such as Halbwachs, Kammen, Zelizer, and Bodnar, working in the cross-disciplinary field of

public memory, to respond to the questions of how we remember the trials today and what impact these memories have on our understanding of the themes of witchcraft and witch hunting in contemporary American society. Therefore, this project uses the lens of rhetorical analysis to provide a method for examining and understanding how individuals, both in the seventeenth century and today, have engaged in the act of updating their reflections about this facet of American history.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

RHETORICAL FRAMEWORK AND WITCHCRAFT HISTORY

The witches' world, like that of any other social group, changes considerably from one generation to the next. And witches are thought to exist in a variety of historical circumstances, in countries with different cultural backgrounds and changing patterns of society.

Julio Caro Baroja, *The World of the Witches*¹

This statement offers an excellent starting point for an examination of witchcraft because it introduces one of the subject's most fascinating aspects – virtually all western societies in recorded history have identified and defined the terms “witch” and “witchcraft” in one way or another. But while all of these groups have made contributions to the history of witchcraft, the ways in which different cultures, or even the same culture at different periods of time have dealt with the subject and/or practice of witchcraft has varied significantly. Indeed, Americans need not look further than their own history to see this contrast by comparing the different connotations associated with identifying Rebecca Nurse as a witch during the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692-1693, and identifying Senator Hillary Clinton as a witch during her 2008 presidential campaign.

In Salem Village of the late seventeenth century, witchcraft was both a crime and a

¹This dissertation follows the style of *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*.

sin. Brian P. Levack writes that during this period, “a witch was a person who not only performed harmful magic [*maleficia*] but who also made a pact with the Devil and paid some sort of homage to him. Witchcraft was therefore diabolism, the worship of the Devil.”² Thus, Rebecca Nurse and the others who were convicted and executed as witches were accused of relying on Satanic powers to perform evil magic that physically harmed members of their community. In this way, for the residents of Salem Village in 1692, witches were “not simply felons, similar to murderers and thieves, but heretics and apostates, intrinsically evil individuals who had rejected their Christian faith.”³

Throughout her 2008 presidential campaign, both American citizens and members of the media seemed to find great joy in poking fun at Senator Hillary Clinton by identifying her as a witch. News articles and political cartoons dubbed her “The Wicked Witch of the West Wing,” and openly discussed the “Clinton Cackle.”⁴ But, in stark contrast to the connotations of witchcraft in Salem, writers and commentators in 2008 used statements such as “Hillary Clinton is a witch who eat babies” to elicit a laugh from their audience.⁵ In response, writers such as Anne Perkins of *The Guardian* have rightly noted that comments such as these are “offensive” and constitute “a deeply personal campaign of vilification.”⁶ And yet, while using the word “witch” in this way carries a clearly negative and misogynistic connotation, the magic that modern Americans might humorously accuse Senator Clinton of practicing is far from the life-threatening black magic that Salem’s witches were accused of learning from the Devil.

Richard Gordon argues that such drastically different interpretations of witchcraft are possible because “from the very beginning, magic has been a term whose semantic

implications can only be understood by close attention to context, to the values and claims that it is made to sustain.”⁷ Thus, an action that one society classifies as black magic, or *maleficia*, might be considered nothing more than make-believe or child’s play to another community that does not share the same system of beliefs. Kenneth Burke would likely agree with the importance that Gordon places on context, but Burke extends this line of argument to contend that understanding a culture’s response to any stimulus is not merely tied to a culture’s values, but to the ways in which the members of that society *interpret* those values.

Thus, in his *Permanence and Change*, Burke argues that

shifts of interpretation result from the different ways in which we group events in the *because of*, *in spite of*, and *regardless of* categories. Such shifts of interpretation make for totally different pictures of reality, since they focus the attention upon different orders of relationship. We learn to single out certain relationships in accordance with the particular linguistic texture into which we are born, though we may privately manipulate this linguistic texture to formulate still other relationships. When we do so, we invent new terms, or apply our old vocabulary in new ways . . . we try to point out new relationships as meaningful – we interpret situations differently; in the subjective sphere, we invent new accounts of motive. Since both the old and the new motives are linguistically constructed, and since language is a *communicative* medium, the present discussion has taken us from orientation, through motivation, to communication.⁸

In this way, Burke claims that the process through which a society shifts their interpretation of witchcraft is an inherently rhetorical course of action. This work will examine the rhetoric surrounding the Salem witchcraft crisis to consider the role that rhetoric played in beginning and ending the crisis at Salem, and how American public memory has represented (and misrepresented) the events of the witch trials through popular culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Examining Witchcraft Rhetorically

Examining the Salem witchcraft crisis from a rhetorical perspective is a logical choice because, as a field of study, rhetoric has always been closely linked to the practice of magic. In his *Ethics of Rhetoric*, Richard Weaver wrote that “rhetoric moves the soul with a movement which cannot finally be justified logically.”⁹ This brief statement concisely acknowledged the mysterious nature of rhetoric that centuries of scholarship have attempted to define and explain. Indeed, hundreds of scholars, from Ancient Greece to modern times have devoted their lives to the elusive pursuit of a definitive understanding of rhetorical power. However, as Weaver noted, the lack of a *consistently logical* explanation for a rhetorician’s ability to captivate, inspire, and move an audience led some individuals to seek an explanation for this power outside the bounds of logical reasoning. Instead, these scholars often acknowledged the intangible, and even *magical* qualities of rhetoric in identifying speeches as “spellbinding” and speakers as “charismatic.”

The fifth century Sophist, Gorgias of Leontini is often cited as the first rhetorician to construct a rhetorical argument based on the magical nature of persuasion. In his *Encomium of Helen*, Gorgias argued that Helen should be exonerated because

speech is a powerful lord, which by means of the finest and most invisible body effects the divinest works: it can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity. . . . There have been discovered two arts of witchcraft and magic: one consists of errors of soul and the other of deceptions of opinion. All who have and do persuade people of things do so by molding a false argument. . . . What cause then prevents the conclusion that Helen similarly, against her will, might have come under the influence of speech, just as if ravished by the force of the mighty?¹⁰

Based on this line of reasoning, numerous rhetorical scholars have concluded that Gorgias viewed the power of rhetoric as a form of magic or witchcraft.¹¹ Indeed, rhetorical historian Thomas Conley states that in the Gorgianic view, “the relationship between speaker and audience is, so to speak, ‘asymmetric,’ as it is the speaker who casts a spell over the audience, and not the other way around.”¹² In his dialogue, *Gorgias*, Plato provides his readers with some context for understanding this type of reasoning from the *Encomium*. As this text begins, the character Socrates asks Gorgias: “what, of the things that are, does rhetoric happen to be about?”¹³ After a rather long analysis of the topic, Socrates rightly concludes that Gorgias believes the power of rhetoric “appears in its greatness to be some magical power.”¹⁴

Although Plato makes it clear a few moments later that Socrates disagrees with this assessment,¹⁵ Gorgias is not alone in the belief that rhetoric constitutes a powerful form of magic. In his book, *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, William Covino writes that

all such declarations, from the cleric’s “I pronounce you husband and wife” to the professor’s “Your final grade is an A” to the boss’s “You’re fired,” are instances in which saying makes it so. In such cases, the rhetor performs magic by effecting real action; in the event that any of us employ powerful words to change a situation, or are ourselves changed by what we read or hear, we participate in a magical transactive transformation.¹⁶

Based on these ideas, Covino goes on to conclude that, “magic is a social act whose medium is persuasive discourse . . . thus magic becomes a term through which we can address the ways in which words make real things happen.”¹⁷ Thus, it is not surprising that throughout American history, the idea and/or practice of witchcraft has been met with a diverse array of

rhetorical responses that range from erratic and irrational fear to disbelief, acceptance, or even humor.

The theoretical work of Kenneth Burke offers a helpful rhetorical perspective from which to approach the examination of America's various rhetorical responses to witchcraft over the past three hundred years. In discussing history, Burke writes that "throughout the History (the Changing Story) of Acceptances and Rejections there broods the fantastic Maybe of the transformations . . . that have to do with the two modes of departure from the state of nature made possible ('inevitable'?) by our peculiarly human medium of expression, identification, communication."¹⁸ Thus, he argues that history is a story, which is told through the uniquely human channel of communication.

Burke devoted a significant portion of his life's work to developing a methodology for the study of this linguistic medium. In one of his later works, *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke named this approach *logology*, or "words about words."¹⁹ He concluded that words hold a significant amount of power because

There is a sense in which the word "transcends" the thing it names. True, there is also a sense in which the word itself is material, a "body," a meaning "incarnate." . . . But the word's "meaning" is not identical with its sheer materiality. There is a qualitative difference between the symbol and the symbolized.²⁰

But how can rhetorical critics discover this "transcendent" nature of words? And more specifically for this study, how can rhetoric aid in understanding how and why the term "witch" and the idea of witchcraft has held several powerful, yet remarkably different connotations over the past three hundred years?

In his *Permanence and Change*, Burke writes extensively about this connection between language and human motivation. He argues that these two concepts are necessarily connected because “the question of motive brings us to the subject of communication, since motives are distinctly linguistic products.”²¹ Additionally, he writes that “to discover in oneself the motives accepted by one’s group is much the same thing as to use the language of one’s group.”²² Therefore, Burke concludes that human motivation is a linguistic construction that should not be viewed as reality, but as a unique interpretation of reality. To verify the truth of this claim, he offers the following examples as proof that actions only become meaningful through the words that we use to describe them:

A ringing bell is in itself as meaningless as an undifferentiated portion of the air we are breathing. It takes on character, meaning, significance (dinner bell or door bell) in accordance with the contexts in which we experience it. A great deal of such character can be imparted to events by purely verbal means, as when we label a bottle “Poison” or when Marxians explain a man’s unemployment for him by attributing it to financial crises inherent in the nature of capitalism. The words themselves will likewise have derived their meanings out of past contexts.²³

Burke calls such interpretations of reality that motivate humans to act “terministic screens” and discusses their purpose and function in several of his major works. In *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke writes that rhetors use “‘terministic screens’ [to] direct the attention” of their audience in such a way that privileges the course of action they wish their listeners and/or readers to take.²⁴ Other scholars have also contributed to our understanding of these devices by conceptualizing terministic screens in their own words. In his editorial introduction to *On Symbols and Society*, a compilation of Burke’s

foundational theoretical work, Joseph R. Gusfield contributes the following description of the role played by terministic screens:

. . . if language is indispensable to human experience it also selects and narrows that experience. It acts as a filter and a screen. It limits the possibilities of experience in ways that present a crucial impediment to thought and action.²⁵

Burke underscores the importance of analyzing terministic screens in his *Permanence and Change* by arguing that they are key to understanding human action because “any given situation derives its character from the entire framework of interpretation by which we judge it.”²⁶ Finally, in his *Attitudes Toward History*, Burke concludes that terministic screens can lead critics to understanding human motivation because “out of such frames we derive our vocabularies for the charting of human motives.”²⁷

Because Burke clearly argues that terministic screens provide powerful linguistic tools to skilled rhetoricians, he offers his readers an important word of caution about the difference between reality and interpretation. In his *Language as Symbolic Action*, Burke writes that “much that we take as observations about ‘reality’ may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms.”²⁸ Thus, because terministic screens significantly influence human motivation, it is often difficult to determine what is “reality” and what is the “dominant interpretation” suggested by a rhetor’s terministic screen.

Indeed, Burke argues that “a motive is not some fixed thing, like a table, which one can go and look at. It is a term of interpretation, and being such it will naturally take its place within the framework of our *Weltanschauung* [worldview] as a whole.”²⁹ And, as

Burke reminds his readers, an individual's worldview often provides a stronger motivation for action than the reality of their situation, for "when justice was a pivotal word in the *Weltanschauung* [worldview], who can say that people did not give up their lives to the cause of justice?"³⁰ This, understanding an individual or group's worldview requires that a rhetorical critic examine the history of the period being studied, because as Burke contends, "historic textures can be said to 'cause' our frameworks of interpretation in the sense that they present varying kinds of materials for us to synthesize."³¹

A Historical Overview of Magic and Witchcraft

Thus, in order to place the events that occurred in Salem Village within the correct context, we must pause to consider an overview of some major events from the history of witchcraft in Western civilization that necessarily inform any discussion about witchcraft. A review of these events will shed light on the complex fusion of influences that brought the practice and fear of witchcraft to the American colonies. Julio Caro Baroja argues in his *World of Witches* that magic was never created or invented; rather, "the magic arts [were] passed down from one generation to the next."³² Richard Gordon agrees with this conclusion in writing that "there has probably been no society, certainly no complex society, without rules concerning the use of whatever forms of religious power are deemed possible."³³ Indeed, even the earliest historical records left by the western world's ancient civilizations indicate that these societies were already well acquainted with magical practices.

Although elements of magic and/or witchcraft were central to quite a few ancient civilizations such as the Egyptians, Jews, and Sumerians, modern scholars argue that the practices recognized as “European witchcraft” are primarily rooted in religious beliefs and customs that were developed within Greco-Roman and Bronze Age northern European civilizations. Thus, this brief overview will examine four critical periods in the history of witchcraft: the Pagan religious beliefs and folklore of the Celts during the Bronze Age, the understanding of magic in the Greco-Roman world, the developing relationship between Christianity and witchcraft during the period known as the “witch craze” in medieval and early modern Europe, and the cultural factors which led to the conflict between God and witchcraft in the Puritan New England colony of Massachusetts.

PAGAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE ANCIENT CELTS

The study of ancient Celtic religious traditions is an essential starting point for any historical overview of European and American Colonial witchcraft. Historians have proven that individuals in both the medieval and early modern periods did not have access to historically accurate information about Celtic civilizations and their pagan religious beliefs. However, as Russell and Alexander argue, “what people believe to be true influences their actions more than what is objectively true.”³⁴ Thus, despite the inaccuracy of their information, both Europeans and American colonials drew on their vague understanding of Pagan folklore in shaping their perceptions about witchcraft.

Unfortunately, modern knowledge of the Celts’ ancient religious practices is limited because they maintained a “religious proscription against setting down their vast store of knowledge in written form in their own language.”³⁵ Because of this limitation, “most of

what we know about the customs and beliefs of the ancient Celts we owe to Classical Greek and Roman writers.”³⁶ However, it is crucial to remember that these writings did not offer the most balanced picture of Celtic culture, because as Haywood argues, “Caesar and other Classical writers wished to portray the Celts as irrational and superstitious barbarians.”³⁷

Despite the fact that Greek and Roman writers had ulterior motives in recording their opinions about the Celts, there were certainly elements of truth within their descriptions. These texts establish that the Celts were highly superstitious and incorporated elements of magic and witchcraft into their religious practices. Additionally, these ancient authors reveal that animism, or “the belief that every part of the natural world, every feature of the landscape, was numinous, possessed of a spirit,” was a vital aspect of the Celtic religious tradition.³⁸ These basic ideologies helped to frame both Celtic beliefs and rituals.

Celtic religious practices, especially their festivals, were scheduled with the help of a calendar system, and archeological evidence has proven that “by the first century AD the Celts in Gaul seem to have possessed an elaborate one.”³⁹ The Celtic year was divided into only two seasons: cold and warm; and a major festival was held to celebrate the beginning of each of these seasons. As Russell and Alexander appropriately note, “nothing persists in the mind more than the memory of a holiday.”⁴⁰ And indeed, modern society is probably more familiar with elements of the two major Pagan festivals than with any other aspect of Celtic culture.

The first of these two festivals, *Samain*, was held on November 1st to celebrate the Celtic New Year. During this celebration, the Celts believed that “any barriers between man and the supernatural were lowered.”⁴¹ Because of the unique nature of this connection, Anne Ross writes that *Samain*

was the most dangerous and the most portentous of all the calendar festivals. At this time the gods moved freely in the world of mankind, and played cruel tricks on unsuspecting people. Men too could enter the Otherworld, but this was a hazardous undertaking.⁴²

Among other rituals that were performed during the festival, “animals which could not be kept through the winter were slaughtered . . . [and] various rites were practiced to discover what the year would bring to the community and to individuals.”⁴³

To mark the beginning of the warm season, the Celts held the festival of *Beltine* or *Beltain* on May 1st. Chadwick describes this celebration as a “festival of optimism.”⁴⁴

However, this time of year was not without worry for the Celts. As the warm season dawned, individuals were concerned about the survival of their crops and livestock over the coming months. Therefore, this event was “marked by the lighting of bonfires and various rites to ensure fertility among the herds and bring a good harvest.”⁴⁵ As Ross reveals, these “calendar festivals and the great assemblies which accompanied them were fundamental to Celtic social life, when the people met not as tribes but as a nation.”⁴⁶

Although many types of rituals were performed at these feasts, sacrificial rites held particular importance during both festival periods and in the Celts’ everyday lives.

Davidson argues that this culture had two primary motivations for conducting sacrificial rites: their desire for luck and a quest to gain knowledge about the future.

These [sacrifices] were made in order to obtain the luck, energy and resources without which no enterprise could succeed in a world of unforeseen calamities and unreliable weather. Much depended on chance, and men realized that in many cases the ability to predict change happenings would determine the outcome. Thus religious ceremonies were constantly linked with revelation of the future. Sacrifice was a means of divination as well as a freewill offering, since the giving up of life was the strongest method known of obtaining a favourable answer or warning of what would come.⁴⁷

He goes on to conclude that based on its cultural significance, Celtic “sacrifice may be seen as a contract between god and worshipper.”⁴⁸ Although she does not disagree with Davidson’s notion of the sacrificial contract, Ross argues that utilitarian principles also provided an important framework for ancient Celtic sacrifice. In her essay, “Ritual and the Druids,” Ross references archeological evidence which proves that it was not uncommon for Celtic communities to ritually kill one animal “in order to preserve the flock or herd from some decimating disease.”⁴⁹

Historical records have clearly shown that *what* was being sacrificed and *how* the sacrifice was being conducted varied considerably from tribe to tribe and occasion to occasion. Thus, both Davidson and Ross contribute important ideas to our understanding of sacrifice within Celtic cultures. We need not conclude that their arguments are mutually exclusive. But despite this rich diversity of theoretical frameworks, the basic principle behind Celtic sacrifice remained the same: the people gave a portion of what they had to their gods and/or goddesses in exchange for divine help in some area of their lives.

The element of these sacrifices that was remembered most vividly during the witch craze, and even today, was the Celtic selection of both animal and human offerings for their gods and goddesses. Animal sacrifices were certainly conducted at all major feasts and

festivals, and pigs were often “choice animals for sacrifice and ritual consumption.”⁵⁰ Dogs were also commonly selected as offerings because they “had much significance for the Celtic people . . . [and] were linked with the Mother goddess.”⁵¹ But several other species including, bulls, boars, horses, rams, goats, stags, and birds were also included in sacrificial rituals.

Although later societies would condemn human sacrifice as barbaric and evil, Haywood argues that this practice “[did] not set the Celts so far apart from their contemporaries.”⁵² Davidson offers a few interesting explanations for why the Celts chose to present their gods and goddesses with such a substantial sacrifice. Some tribes engaged in human sacrificial rites as a form of divination because they believed that “valuable knowledge . . . could be acquired from a man who died a violent death.”⁵³ Other tribes chose to use human sacrifice as a means of celebration. Classical sources reveal that “when captives were taken in war, a proportion of them might be offered as a thanksgiving for victory.”⁵⁴ However, as Chadwick argues, “popular imagination has seized on this apparently gruesome aspect of Celtic ritual, and perhaps has exaggerated it. There can be little doubt that human sacrifice was practiced, but it was unlikely to have been a common feature of day-to-day ritual.”⁵⁵

Celtic human sacrifice is also remembered because the Druids, or priests, “were in charge of religion and its attendant ritual.”⁵⁶ And, as Haywood argues, “no aspect of Celtic religion has attracted more attention than the Druids.”⁵⁷ This Celtic religious order was “an intellectual class, aristocratic in composition and tendency” who spent twenty years learning and training for their responsibilities.⁵⁸ Their education was essential to Celtic

religious practice because the Druids “alone knew the will of the gods, with whom they could communicate directly. They were also known as philosophers; their specialist knowledge included astrology and astronomy, medicine, magic, legal expertise and skill as teachers and historians.”⁵⁹

The role of women as priestesses or Druidesses is still debated among historians today. Some argue “that it is probable that the word druidess was applied to wise women, without any other significance than that the women were native prophetesses.”⁶⁰ Others contend that, “so frequent are the allusions to ‘Druidesses,’ or women associated with the Druidic cult, in both classical and ancient Irish literature, that the existence of these can scarcely be denied.”⁶¹ But even if such arguments proved that women were allowed to participate in religious leadership, this element of gender equality would be the exception to the rule. Historical and archeological evidence clearly shows that while Celtic women “generally enjoyed more freedom and opportunity than their counterparts” in Greece and Rome, they were still living in “a man’s world.”⁶²

Although this discussion illustrates that the Celts utilized “some highly distinctive religious practices . . . [and] were unusual in ancient Europe [for] having a class of professional priests,” they did share many general religious beliefs and practices with their contemporaries in Greece and Rome.⁶³ The traditions from each of these ancient cultures become vital to understanding witchcraft in colonial America because the early modern conception of witchcraft can be seen as “a composite of concepts gradually assembled over the centuries.”⁶⁴ With this in mind, we will turn to a brief overview of the role of religious practices and magical understanding in ancient Greece and Rome.

MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

Magical beliefs and practices played an integral role in both Greek and Roman civilizations, which grew and flourished for over a millennium. As Gordon reminds us, “there was no single ‘ancient view of magic.’ Rather, a whole gamut of representations and claims competed in the market-place, each with its own agenda.”⁶⁵ Clearly, a thorough study of the myriad roles of magic within each of these distinct cultures constitutes a unique and rich field of scholarship that cannot be fully addressed in this brief essay. As such, this discussion will be limited to an overview of a few key principles and practices of Greco-Roman magic that significantly influenced the practice and understanding of witchcraft in Europe and the “New World” during the medieval and early modern periods.

Before considering the actual practice of magic during this period, it is essential to understand the Greco-Roman worldview about the purpose and role of magic. Derek Collins argues in his *Magic in the Ancient Greek World* that magic was a pervasive and undisputed element of Greek culture. Indeed, he writes that for Greeks, “what was not open to question, and therefore prompted no discussion, was a world view in which magic, even if disproved in the case of a particular individual, remained possible.”⁶⁶ Thus, magical practices were often closely connected to Greco-Roman religious beliefs and their fundamental understanding of the role that gods and goddesses played in society.

This connection between religion and magic is clearly communicated through literature from antiquity. Homer’s *Odyssey*, which can be reliably dated back further than the six century B.C.E., provides two clear examples of the Greek hero Odysseus using magic in his interactions with divine beings. In book 10, the god Hermes stops Odysseus on his

way to the palace of the goddess Circe. Hermes warns the hero that Circe “will mix [him] a potion, and cast drugs into the food” that will turn him into a pig.⁶⁷ In order to prevent this from occurring, Hermes provides Odysseus with a “potent herb” that protects the hero from the effects of Circe’s magical drugs.⁶⁸ Odysseus uses this herb and is saved from “the transformative effects of [Circe’s] *pharmaka*.”⁶⁹

Because Odysseus survived their initial encounter without becoming “bewitched,” Circe listens to his request and sends him to visit the underworld.⁷⁰ Here, Circe tells Odysseus that he must conduct animal sacrifices to summon the dead so that he might speak with Teiresias, a “seer” and “leader of men” who would “tell [him his] way and the measures of [his] path, and of [his] return, how [he] mayest go over the teeming deep.”⁷¹ Gordon refers to these literary examples as “‘magic before magic,’ of the more or less negatively-marked deployment of religious power for socially doubtful ends.”⁷²

To understand why the Greeks and Romans tied magical practices and religious beliefs so closely together, we must understand that their worldview assumed an intricate connection between the earthly and the divine. As Baroja points out,

in Greek and Roman times . . . the spirit-world was thought to be so all-embracing that the most insignificant human actions were held to be the expression of something divine, while the celestial and terrestrial bodies were gods in themselves. Nature could not possibly, therefore, be thought of as a separate entity with an independent system of laws. And with such a view of nature as this, there could be no absolute frontier between magic and religion. Minds which believed in the existence of so many gods, and which were dominated by a magical conception of things, could hardly be expected to distinguish radically between nature and religion.⁷³

Thus, individuals in ancient Greece and Rome were motivated to use magic as a strategy for controlling their natural environment. Historians have concluded that Greek and Roman

leaders (both religious, such as priests, and professionals, such as doctors) relied on magical procedures to “produce rain, prevent hail-storms, drive away clouds, calm the winds, make animals and plants prosper, increase wealth and fortune, cure sickness and so on.”⁷⁴

While the use of magic for purposes such as these might have come from genuinely sincere and beneficial intentions, the Greek and Roman festivals and rituals that surrounded their magical practices played a significant role in shaping medieval Europe’s largely negative view of magic and witchcraft. These events provided individuals an opportunity to appease gods and goddesses through the use of magical practices, and in turn influence the deity (or deities) to fulfill their earthly desires and/or needs. In their *History of Witchcraft*, Russell and Alexander provide the following example of some typical activities conducted during festivals of worship for Dionysos – the god of wine who was often associated with fertility.

The Dionysian rites took place at night, often in a cave or grotto, locations connected with fertility and the powers of the underworld. The worshippers were usually women led by a male priest. The procession bore torches and a phallic image, and led a dark goat or its image. The goat, symbol of fertility, represented Dionysos, who was usually portrayed as shaggy and horned. The rite concluded in wine-drinking, ecstatic dancing, and animal sacrifice.⁷⁵

As these authors point out, festivals such as this “became a blueprint for the rites allegedly practiced by the medieval witches.”⁷⁶

While the *existence* of magic was an unquestioned element of Greek and Roman culture, it is essential to understand that the *practice* of magic did not occur without controversy in either of these civilizations. Debates about magical practices centered around two issues. First, because of the Greco-Roman fear of and respect for their gods and goddesses, many individuals questioned “whether a claim to be able to practice magic

implied some unwarranted control over the gods.”⁷⁷ Secondly, historical records clearly prove that not all individuals used their magical practices to achieve noble goals. Indeed, Baroja notes that

magic was also used in Greece and Rome for more obviously perverted reasons: in country areas, for instance, it might be used to ruin an enemy’s crops or make his cattle sicken; in the city, it was used to strike down an enemy when he was on the point of making a speech or taking an important part in some public celebration; or it was used to prevent a rival from winning a race or some other event in the public games. Death was quite frequently considered to be the result of witchery.⁷⁸

Thus, we can see how both Greek and Roman civilizations were able to construct a clear division between the *idea* of magic, which was pure and tied closely to religious practices, and the *application* of those ideas, which could be perverted by fallible human beings for evil ends. Baroja argues that this dichotomy highlights the “dual role of magic” that existed during this period.⁷⁹ On the one hand, we have White magic that is “useful to society [and] . . . done in the open and in the broad daylight;” and on the other is Black magic that is “anti-social . . . evil and secret, done under the cover of night.”⁸⁰

The fear of Black magic and its practitioners led the Romans to legally condemn the use of “magic for evil purposes” long before the Christian period.⁸¹ Indeed, “the crime of sorcery in Roman law was punishable by death.”⁸² However, Gordon reminds his readers that determining how to legally classify, legislate, and punish magical practices have been troublesome endeavors for thousands of years and can be traced back to the legal repression of magic in both Greece and Rome. Because individuals in these societies held a “diversity of views about what constituted magic,” it was challenging to “define what precisely, if anything, was criminal about magic.”⁸³

As Christianity gained prominence and popularity with the Roman Empire during the first three hundred years of what we now refer to as the “Common Era,” many individuals began to question and reject pagan forms of worship. Collins argues that “in the history of magic from Greek and Roman antiquity to the early Middle Ages, there were crucial shifts in the understanding of how magic worked, which ultimately resulted in the bifurcation of magic into a natural and demonic counterpart.”⁸⁴ Indeed, as societies moved into the medieval period of European history, magic and witchcraft became increasingly tied to Christianity’s perception and judgment of pagan beliefs.

THE PERSECUTION OF WITCHCRAFT IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN EUROPE

In the year 313 C.E., the relationship between the practice of magic/witchcraft and “mainstream” Western civilization changed dramatically. Constantine’s Edict of Milan granted “Christians free and unrestricted opportunity of religious worship;” thereby legalizing the practice of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire.⁸⁵ This letter also declared that “other religions [retained] the right of open and free observance of their worship for the sake of the peace of our times, that each one may have the free opportunity to worship as he pleases.”⁸⁶ We have already observed that a close relationship between religion and magic was firmly established in each of the ancient civilizations that were now unified under Roman rule, and as a result, such an ideal society where both pagan and Christian beliefs could be practiced openly was never a lasting reality.

Baroja argues that despite Constantine’s plea for religious tolerance, “the gods of antiquity were equated with devils; or, after the inevitable process of simplification had taken place, with the Devil himself. The elements of piety, morality and decorum in the

private and public worship of the Greeks and Romans were forgotten.”⁸⁷ It is also essential to remember the tension between the power of the gods and goddesses and the power of magic that was debated among the ancient Greeks and Romans. This fear that magic and witchcraft offered humanity power to control divine beings could not merely be forgotten. Indeed, this tension between magical practices and divine power would transform magicians and witches from eccentric individuals into heretics.

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.) is often considered the first Christian theologian and the greatest of the Church Fathers. As such, his opinion about the practice of witchcraft was extremely influential in defining how both Catholics and Protestants viewed pagan religious beliefs and traditions in Europe during the Middle Ages. In his writings, Augustine “described the powers of the Devil on earth, identified him as the source of all magic, and condemned the practice of magic as idolatry, paganism, and heresy.”⁸⁸ In his *City of God*, Augustine connects magical practices to the Devil by contrasting the miracles that are described in the Christian Bible and the acts of magicians. Augustine argues that true miracles “were wrought by simple faith and godly confidence, not by the incantations and charms composed under the influence of a criminal tampering with the unseen world;” while the results of magic are “the deceitful rites of the demons.”⁸⁹ His reasoning in support of these conclusions clearly conveyed Augustine’s belief that, “both reality and illusion are works of the Devil.”⁹⁰

As Christianity spread into Northern Europe, and clashed with native pagan religions, the practice of witchcraft reached an important turning point. Russell and Alexander argue that “the encounter between Christianity and Celtic and Teutonic religions

was one of the most important steps in the formations of historical witchcraft.”⁹¹ In the same way that early Christian Fathers had associated the gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome with the Devil, European religious and political leaders during the Middle Ages transformed Celtic gods and goddesses into demons. Thus, “with this stroke, all pagans, as well as sorcerers, could be viewed as part of the monstrous plan of Satan to frustrate the salvation of the world.”⁹²

However, it is essential to note that this transition did not occur overnight. Clark and Richardson point out that

during the early medieval period, simple sorcery or natural magic were treated with relative leniency, and Christian theologians and bishops explicitly taught that witchcraft was only illusion, fantasy, or hallucination, a form of pagan superstition. . . . Indeed, elements of simple sorcery were sometimes incorporated into Christian religious practice, and popular magic and superstitious practices appear to have pervaded many layers of European society.⁹³

During this transitional period, many elements of paganism were adapted into a Christian framework. Pagan gods and goddesses became saints, and the two festivals discussed earlier, *Samain* and *Beltine*, became Hallow’een on the eve of All Saints’ Day and the Christian feast of Walpurgisnacht on the eve of May Day.⁹⁴ Despite the continuation of these honored individuals and traditions, Russell and Alexander remind us that “survivals *from* paganism . . . [are] not the same as a survival *of* paganism.”⁹⁵ Ultimately, as Christianity gained widespread power and influence across Europe, “almost all sorcery and folk magic came to be included under the rubric of heresy.”⁹⁶

In her *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief*, Christina Larner argues that the type of witchcraft targeted by Christian theology cannot be classified into the

traditional pagan categories of “white” or “black.” Instead, a new type of witchcraft was created that

existed only from the fifteenth to the early eighteenth century and has no contemporary equivalent. It differed from the simple concepts of black and white witchcraft in its origins. Far from being an experience of village life, it was evolved by churchmen and lawyers from Christian theology, cannon law and certain philosophical ideas. It differed also in content. Christian witch theorists gave a central position to the idea of the demonic pact. The witch became a witch by virtue of a personal arrangement with the Devil who appeared to his potential recruit in some physical form.⁹⁷

Thus, during this period, “mainstream” society transformed their overall worldview about the nature and purpose of witchcraft. Magical practices were no longer an acceptable way for individuals to maintain control over their natural environment. This new, Christian perspective on witchcraft did not allow society to look to the witch or wizard’s intentions to determine whether the magic they practiced was good or evil. Instead, “Christian witch theory [held] that the witch did not operate alone. Witchcraft involved midnight meetings to worship the Devil, to receive his orders and to have sexual intercourse with him or his subordinate spirits.”⁹⁸ Therefore, the prevailing legal and religious beliefs of the time no longer judged magical practices by the morality of their intentions. Without exception, “the witch became a person who exercised maleficent magical power by virtue of having made a pact with the Devil.”⁹⁹

Once the use of witchcraft had been so definitively associated with the Devil, both religious and political leaders throughout Europe had to come to a decision about how they would deal with the “evil” practices they were discovering in the midst of their communities and churches. The full scope of the witch-craze and the accompanying trials and executions

is far too vast and diverse to cover with any detail in this brief review. In describing the extent of these events, Clark and Richardson note that “between 1450 and 1750 in various parts of Europe and European colonies, religious and secular authorities undertook a sustained effort to identify and eliminate practitioners of witchcraft. . . . Tens (and perhaps hundreds) of thousands were accused and executed.”¹⁰⁰

The inquisitions led by the Roman Catholic Church are perhaps the most infamous of the systematized persecution of witches from this period. In 1484, Pope Innocent VIII issued a bull, or edict, to clarify the Church’s official position on the prosecution and punishment of witchcraft as heresy. In this document, the pontificate communicated his displeasure that “many persons of both sexes, unmindful of their own salvation and straying from the Catholic Faith, have abandoned themselves to devils.”¹⁰¹ He goes on to detail some of these individuals’ heretical offenses:

. . . by their incantations, spells, conjurations, and other accursed charms and crafts, enormities and horrid offences, [these persons] have slain infants yet in the mother’s womb, as also the offspring of cattle, have blasted the produce of the earth . . . these wretches furthermore afflict and torment men and women, beasts of burthen [sic], herd-beasts, as well as animals of other kinds, with terrible and piteous pains and sore diseases . . . they hinder men from performing the sexual act and women from conceiving, whence husbands cannot know their wives or wives receive their husbands; over and above this, they blasphemously renounce that Faith which is theirs by the Sacrament of Baptism, and at the instigation of the Enemy of Mankind they do not shrink from committing and perpetrating the foulest abominations and filthiest excesses to the deadly peril of their own souls, whereby they outrage the Divine Majesty and are a cause of scandal and danger to very many.¹⁰²

After listing these problematic occurrences, Innocent VIII writes that his Inquisitors, Kramer and Sprenger, have full authority to apply “potent remedies to prevent

the disease of heresy and other turpitudes diffusing their poison to the destruction of many innocent souls.”¹⁰³ With the benefit of hindsight, we realize that this license to use “potent remedies” led to the deaths of thousands of accused witches and wizards. However, As Levack points out, “there was nothing special about this papal bull. Other popes had granted similar jurisdictional authority to its inquisitors in the name of protecting the faith. . . . The only reason for the notoriety of the document is that Kramer published it two years later as a preface to his witchcraft treatise, the *Malleus Maleficarum*.”¹⁰⁴

Kramer wrote the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1486 as a guidebook for other Inquisitors who were leading investigations into cases of suspected witchcraft. History has remembered this treatise for indoctrinating the highly misogynistic beliefs of medieval Christians that initiated and fueled witchcraft persecutions throughout both Europe and the American colonies until the end of the seventeenth century. Throughout the *Malleus*, Kramer constructs numerous arguments in support of his thesis that women are more likely than men to become witches because they “are intellectually like children . . . [and] more carnal than a man.”¹⁰⁵ Tragically, this line of reasoning did not leave room for any exceptions.

In his *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*, Walter Stephens points out that the *Malleus* relies on “medieval theology and philosophy [to undergird] the book’s argumentation.”¹⁰⁶ Clearly, Kramer was relying on an existing theological foundation of his time when he wrote that “there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib . . . and through this defect . . . she always deceives.”¹⁰⁷ However, his conclusion that women were *inherently* defective highlights the extent of

perceived male superiority that lay at the core of medieval theology. Based on Kramer's erroneous reasoning, there was no way for women to rise out of their "inferior" and "flawed" condition. All women must *necessarily* be prone to the devil's tactics and the practice of witchcraft. Thus, while being female was not a *requirement* for being a witch, women were much more susceptible to allegations of witchcraft than the men in their communities.

Clearly, issues related to gender, religion, and witchcraft have a long and complex history. Dozens, if not hundreds of texts have been written about the European witch trials.¹⁰⁸ The first recorded trial and execution occurred in 1324 in Ireland and the last was held in 1782 in Switzerland. Because these trials spanned over four hundred years of history and took place throughout the European continent, it is impossible to generalize about these events too much. However, there are some important facts about witch hunting in Europe as a whole that provide a critical historical context for understanding the Salem witch trials.

Unfortunately, many historical records kept during the European trials have been either lost or destroyed, and historians may never truly realize the full extent of the trials. However, most scholars generally agree that around 90,000 individuals were accused and tried for witchcraft, and of those, about 45,000 were actually executed for their crimes. Historians also agree that about 75-80% of the individuals executed for witchcraft were women. While these events took place throughout Europe, the height of the trials was undoubtedly centered in Germany from 1550-1650. Indeed, Thurston points out that if you drew a circle with a 300-mile radius around the city of Strasbourg, you would select an

area in which over 50% of the trials occurred.¹⁰⁹ Although many conditions combined to create a climate ripe for witch hunting, scholars typically point to the plague, the re-emergence of torture in the judicial system, and the growing power of the Catholic Church as important factors that triggered the beginning of the European witch trials.

The Catholic Church was one of the most powerful and influential groups instigating and sustaining episodes of witch hunting throughout Europe. Stuart Clark highlights several important aspects of Catholic theology that help to explain the nature and scope of the church's influence.¹¹⁰ First, he notes that because Catholicism was highly tied to ritual, Catholics believed that the correct way to deal with witchcraft was to take an active stance against it. In fact, Clark notes that some Catholic theologians claimed that the reason why God allowed witchcraft to be practiced on earth was because he also provided humanity with a way to fight it through rituals such as exorcisms and inquisitions. Additionally, the Catholic Church seemed to be very interested in what Clark terms the "sensational aspects of demonism," or the relationship between sex and witchcraft.

In the conclusion to her analysis of the history of witchcraft, Lerner argues that it is impossible to offer a "simple" explanation for the devastating events surrounding the practice of witchcraft in Medieval Europe. She writes that

witch-beliefs and witch-hunting were many-faceted, and the European witch prosecutions require a multiple explanation. Necessary preconditions are a peasant (or pre-industrial) economy and near-universal popular witch beliefs. These preconditions, however, obtained long before, and in most of Europe long after, the witchcraft prosecutions. Further requirements were an active belief in the Devil among the educated, a well developed legal organization . . . and a degree of lay literacy. But the crucial factors were the rise of nation states, and the development of personal religion among the peasantry. . . . The rise of rival versions of Christianity, each with exclusive

claims, greatly enhanced the political usefulness of religion to the rules of early modern Europe. Borders were staked out not with fences but with churches.¹¹¹

As individuals from across Europe began to settle the “New World,” they did not leave their beliefs about witchcraft and their many “rival versions” of Christianity in their homeland. Instead, the legacy of Medieval Europe’s confrontation with witches and wizards travelled with these new colonials across the Atlantic Ocean and ultimately contributed to a new phase in the tumultuous history of witchcraft.

THE CONFLICT OF WITCHCRAFT AND RELIGION IN PURITAN NEW ENGLAND

By virtue of the fact that the colonies were much smaller (both in geographical scope and population) than the European continent, the trials in America occurred on a much smaller scale. However, these events were also deadly and the historical facts about colonial trials highlight the important relationship between gender and religion in the New World. The first trial was held in 1647 in Connecticut and the final trial ended in 1693 in Massachusetts. Again, many records have been lost or destroyed, but historians agree that around 350 individuals were tried and 35 were executed for witchcraft. It is interesting to note, that just as in Europe, approximately 75-80% of those killed as witches were women. The height of the trials in the New World undoubtedly took place in Salem where around 150-160 people were tried, nineteen were executed for crimes of witchcraft, and one man died under torture for refusing to respond to the charges of witchcraft brought against him.¹¹²

Carol F. Karlsen opens her *Devil in the Shape of a Woman* by arguing that the Salem witch trials occurred “among too educated a populace for us to dismiss it as mere

‘superstition.’”¹¹³ In many ways, this argument has a great deal of merit. When the first accusations were made in the spring of 1692, over two hundred years had passed since Kramer wrote the *Malleus*. During this time, scientists and doctors had learned a great deal about the inner-workings of both the human body and the natural world. But despite all of this knowledge, the residents of Salem, Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century shared some fundamental concerns with their Celtic and Greco-Roman ancestors. In her *Devil’s Snare*, Mary Beth Norton reminds her readers that although scientific advances had been made,

in the world of 1692, many events lacked obvious explanations. Children suddenly sickened and died; animals suffered mysterious ailments; strange noises were heard or ghostly visions seen. Early New Englanders envisioned themselves as residing in what one historian has termed a ‘world of wonders,’ in which the universe of invisible spirits surrounding them was as real as the one they could see, touch, and feel. . . . With very few exceptions, they believed unhesitatingly in the existence of witches. When they encountered harmful events that otherwise seemed inexplicable, New Englanders often concluded that a malevolent witch had caused their troubles.¹¹⁴

Norton’s analysis clearly proves that even after a millennium of scientific and medical discoveries, American colonials were just as afraid of unexplainable events outside of their control as the pagan Celts, Greeks, and Romans.

And, just as individuals in each of these ancient civilizations, early modern Americans turned to religion to provide a rationale for their superstitions. Godbeer concludes that

for all the Puritans’ determination to break with the “superstitions” of the past, especially those associated with the Catholic Church, they were just as convinced as other English folk on both sides of the Atlantic that the universe was an enchanted place. . . . Any extraordinary event that seemed

to interrupt the natural order – comets and eclipses, dramatic fires and epidemics, deformed births and inexplicable crop failures, dreams and visions – carried supernatural significance. Some were sent by God, others by Satan.¹¹⁵

As Taylor argues, Puritan religious beliefs were key to the American colonial understanding of uncontrollable events because none of these individuals “wished to believe that misfortune lacked a supernatural meaning, for random accident would confirm their helplessness and their isolation in a world without God.”¹¹⁶

Thus, we must conclude that while Karlsen was correct in writing that the Salem witch trials cannot be dismissed as *only* a result of superstition, we cannot overlook the role of religiously based superstition within the crisis as a whole. Indeed, there were certainly countless sociological, legal, political, religious, and psychological factors that contributed to the events that would occur in Salem Village during 1692. This review will look more specifically at three of the most significant of these issues: interpersonal conflicts, the survival of folk magic practices, and the guidance of Puritan spiritual leaders.

The development of interpersonal conflicts was an element of daily life in colonial villages that fueled witchcraft persecutions throughout New England. In his *Escaping Salem*, Godbeer explained that “enmities tended to be intense and festering in [New England] communities . . . for the simple reason that everyone’s welfare depended on personal cooperation. Day-to-day life involved innumerable informal exchanges and favors between neighbors, relatives, friends, and sometimes enemies.”¹¹⁷ Indeed, American colonials were faced with countless struggles in their daily lives ranging from famine and disease to property disputes and even Indian attacks. Therefore, as Boyer and Nissenbaum

conclude, accusations of witchcraft within a community were not the source of interpersonal conflict, but “laid bare the intensity with which they were experienced and heightened the vindictiveness with which they were expressed.”¹¹⁸

One interesting facet of interpersonal conflicts and the witchcraft allegations that grew out of them in New England communities was that, despite the view of “woman as witch” established by Kramer in the *Malleus*, women were often involved as both accused and accuser in colonial witchcraft trials. In his *Legal History* of the Salem witchcraft trials, Hoffer argues that in many ways, the legacy of the *Malleus* was an integral aspect of witchcraft allegations during the early modern period.

. . . the targets of witchcraft prosecutions were overwhelmingly women, in part because men had fashioned the offense to persecute women. Women who were different, women who would not show submissiveness to men, women who violated the special rules men laid down making women inferior than men in the eyes of the law, the church, and even their neighbors – such women found themselves accused of witchcraft. Men of learning in England and New England agreed: suspected witches were either weak-minded wenches, easily misled by the Great Deceiver, or ill-tempered hags who asked the Devil for assistance.¹¹⁹

Although colonial witchcraft trials often victimized women, Larner reminds her readers that “at the village level, nevertheless, many accusations of witchcraft were between women. Where men might use knives, women used words.”¹²⁰ Indeed, men in New England towns and villages enjoyed several avenues of legal recourse to resolve conflicts with individuals in their communities, but women were not provided with these officially recognized options. Instead, they had to rely on husbands, fathers, or brothers to file formal charges in any legal action. However, by accusing someone of practicing witchcraft, women gained a measure

of authority to settle their conflicts. As Hoffer concluded, New England's witchcraft trials prove that women "were capable of fighting back, and they did."¹²¹

The underlying interpersonal conflicts that led to witchcraft allegations in American colonial communities were only fueled by the survival of folk magic practices throughout New England. Godbeer argues that

alongside Protestant Christianity there survived and flourished in New England less formal and yet influential folk beliefs that the settlers brought from England, including those that underlay the use of magic. Folk magic was based on the assumption that men and women could wield supernatural power for their own benefit. Many settlers believed that through the use of simple techniques, passed down from one generation to the next, they could harness occult forces so as to achieve greater knowledge and control over their lives. Experts in these techniques – often called "cunning folk" – told fortunes, claimed to heal the sick, and offered protection against witchcraft.¹²²

The historical documentation of witchcraft trials shows that practicing these folk magic traditions in New England communities was a doubled-edged sword. Individuals who engaged in these practices with either good or evil intentions were often charged, tried, and executed as witches and wizards.

But, as Hoffer points out, "in times of stress, formal religion, with its priests and books of prayers, may not comfort so much as older customs."¹²³ Thus, many individuals who were responsible for condemning "witches" to death also turned to defensive magic as a way to cure afflicted members of their families and churches. Godbeer notes that Puritan ministers and American colonials viewed the use of folk magic to counteract the effects of witchcraft very differently. Ministers throughout New England "were horrified by the popularity of magical techniques, especially among devout settlers [and] . . . did not doubt

that magic worked, but according to them it did so because the Devil intervened to assist whoever used it.”¹²⁴ But while these religious leaders were concerned with the cause or source of magical power,

New Englanders were more concerned with the results. Their attitude was pragmatic: tradition taught that such forces existed and that they could be useful. Some settlers may not have understood why magic was objectionable from a theological perspective; others may have understood quite well their ministers’ objections, but quietly ignored official warnings or set aside their own misgivings for the simple reason that magic answered certain needs for knowledge and control that Puritan theology reserved only for God. While godly colonists turned to magic, they were not rejecting their religious faith so much as turning to whatever supernatural resource seemed helpful at the given moment.¹²⁵

Thus, remnants of pagan religious traditions from the Celts, Greeks, and Romans played an integral role in the American colonial witchcraft trials. Both those accused of witchcraft and the “godly” individuals who fought against them were drawn to the use of traditional magic in an attempt to gain a sense of control over their environment – just as ancient individuals had done hundreds of years earlier. Ultimately, the use of folk magic within New England’s towns and villages escalated interpersonal conflicts into struggles between parishioners and their ministers.

With this in mind, we come to the final aspect of colonial life that offered a significant contribution to witchcraft allegations – the religious beliefs that dominated the minds and actions of Puritan communities in the New World. Indeed, Karlsen argues that “the words of seventeenth-century settlers show that witchcraft was, first and foremost, a set of dynamic religious beliefs.”¹²⁶ While interpersonal conflicts were dangerous as seeds of

division and animosity, Boyer and Nissenbaum conclude that quarrels within New England communities became even more intense because they took on a moral tone.

To understand this intensity, we must recognize the fact . . . what was going on was not simply a personal quarrel, an economic dispute, or even a struggle for power, but a mortal conflict involving the very nature of the community itself. The fundamental issue was not who was to control the Village, but what its essential character was to be.¹²⁷

Indeed, the religious leaders throughout New England clearly argued that the struggle between God and the Devil was key to understanding any contemporary crisis surrounding the practice of witchcraft.

Hoffer argues that ministers took a special interest in cases of alleged witchcraft because “the witch who made a pact with the Devil (or thought she made such a pact, or even wanted to make such a pact) undermined the authority of the learned ministry. . . . [Therefore,] suspected witchcraft was associated with irreligion, and irreligion could not be tolerated.”¹²⁸ During the height of witchcraft trials in the American colonies, the rhetorical works of influential Puritan ministers throughout New England, in the form of both sermons and written documents, were focused on the eternal gravity of the sin of magic and witchcraft. Stephens concludes that “one of the main tasks of witchcraft theory was to demonstrate that God’s control over the physical and moral cosmos was perfect.”¹²⁹ Thus, Puritan ministers transformed the legal and social conflicts surrounding witchcraft into a battle for the souls of American colonials.

The Puritan perspective on witchcraft varied significantly from the Catholic beliefs that were so influential in Europe.¹³⁰ Puritans rejected all forms of ritual and relied instead on faith, prayer, worship, and legitimate medical practices to cure both physical and

spiritual ailments. Additionally, Puritan ministers underscored the fact that all magical practices were viewed as sinful – whether they were conducted with beneficial or detrimental intentions. Therefore, folk magic practices that had once co-existed (although not always peacefully) with Christianity in Europe were rejected by the religious members of the Salem community. Indeed, Puritan ministers even preached against the practice of counter-magic, or engaging in witchcraft to cure someone of possession or prevent demons or witches from entering households.¹³¹

In writing about the role that witches played during the early modern period, Larner argues that whether in the realm of legal accusations or religious conflicts, “whether anonymous or publicly identified, a witch threatens the established order.”¹³² This statement was especially true in Puritan New England where both colonials and Puritan ministers sought to understand the world around them through accusing “witches” and “wizards” of causing devastating and otherwise unexplainable events in their lives. Ultimately, this analysis highlights the fact that New England communities were divided in their attitude toward witchcraft, with many citizens turning to folk magic to solve their problems, and religious leaders condemning all uses of witchcraft – regardless of the practitioner’s intentions. Weisman writes that this conflict created a “curiously divided and unstable New England policy toward witchcraft.”¹³³ Indeed, this tension would prove to be an important factor in Salem’s witchcraft crisis of 1692.

Rhetorical Frameworks

With this historical context in mind, the present examination will investigate how rhetorical texts influenced the witch trials that were held in Salem in 1691-1692, how rhetoric shaped the response to this event, and how rhetorical artifacts in the twentieth and twentieth first centuries have shaped American public memory of the Salem witchcraft crisis. Because each of these screens is unique, I will draw from three different rhetorical frameworks (constitutive rhetoric, *apologia*, and public memory) to understand how rhetors have been able to “direct the attention” of their audiences toward reaching a specific judgment or accepting a certain interpretation of historical events.

As in any rhetorical project, there are some limitations to my methodological approach, and I would like to provide two important points of clarification before offering a brief overview of these three chapters. First, because I am dealing with approximately twenty distinct artifacts in this project, it is not my goal to provide an in-depth analysis or a close reading of these texts. Instead, each analysis chapter will rely on summaries of the artifacts that are supported through a significant amount of textual evidence. Second, because the Salem witchcraft crisis has been discussed by numerous writers, thinkers, scholars, and producers over the past three hundred years, this project does not aim to touch on *all* of the works that have been generated about the Salem witchcraft trials during this period. Rather than attempting a comprehensive review of all of these works, I have carefully selected artifacts that I believe will provide the most rich and diverse discussions of

each of the periods and/or topics under investigation. The selection of each of these artifacts will be covered in more detail in each chapter.

CONSTITUTIVE RHETORIC

Chapter II will examine how individuals constructed the identity of the witch immediately before and during the Salem witchcraft trials in the late seventeenth century. More specifically, my analysis in this chapter will seek to answer the question: “how did rhetoric help to begin and fuel the Salem witchcraft crisis?” During this period, Salem Village and many of the surrounding communities were organized and governed by their Puritan ministers. In his legal history of the Salem trials, Peter Charles Hoffer argues that these spiritual leaders took a special interest in cases of alleged witchcraft because “the witch who made a pact with the Devil (or thought she made such a pact, or even wanted to make such a pact) undermined the authority of the learned ministry. . . . [Therefore,] suspected witchcraft was associated with irreligion, and irreligion could not be tolerated.”¹³⁴ During the height of witch hunting in the American colonies, the rhetorical works of influential Puritan ministers throughout New England, in the form of both sermons and written treatises, were focused on the eternal gravity of the sin of magic and witchcraft. Through these works, prominent leaders such as Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and Samuel Parris effectively crafted a terministic screen for Puritan communities that identified a witch as someone who was “confederate with the Devil.”¹³⁵

In his examination of the rhetorical identity of “the people,” McGee writes

I would argue that a kind of rhetoric defines “the people” at each stage in a “collectivization process” of coming-to-be, being, and ceasing-to-be an objectively real entity. . . . From time to time, advocates organize

dissociated ideological commitments into incipient political myths, visions of the collective life dangled before individuals in hope of creating a real “people.”¹³⁶

In building on McGee’s understanding of the rhetorical construction of group identity, White defined constitutive rhetoric as “the art of constituting character, community, and culture in language.”¹³⁷ Charland’s analysis of the nationalist movement in Quebec furthered this understanding of constitutive rhetoric in arguing that “collective identities forming the basis of rhetorical appeals themselves depend upon rhetoric.”¹³⁸ The present examination of the treatises and sermons of Puritan ministers during the period of the Salem witchcraft crisis will look to the power of constitutive rhetoric to understand how these spiritual leaders framed a terministic screen that paralyzed Salem’s religious community with fear, but left them with few ways to cope with their anxiety, and ultimately created a cultural climate that was extremely vulnerable to the escalation of a crisis.

APOLOGIA

In the wake of the divisive and deadly years of 1691-1692, the religious and political leaders of both Salem and the colony of Massachusetts were forced to reconsider their definition of the “witch” and their understanding of the events that transformed a small community’s witchcraft trial into a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. Indeed, with the understanding that the individuals who had been executed for practicing witchcraft were not actually guilty of such a sinful crime, the residents of Salem Village began to question the validity of equating folk magic practices with being in confederation with the Devil. Thus, my analysis in the third chapter will attempt to answer the question: “how was rhetoric manipulated to formulate a variety of explanations for the Salem witchcraft crisis?”

In discussing how community leaders dealt with the ideological shift necessary to re-construct the identity of the witch and understand the devastating events that had taken place in Salem, Hoffer explains that,

in the seventeenth century the word *apology* had two meanings. The first was to say that one was sorry. The second, closer to the Greek origin of the word, was to explain. As the trials wound down, many who were involved in them began to formulate one or the other kind of apology.¹³⁹

The study of *apologia*, or the rhetoric of defense, can be traced to Ware and Lunkugel's article on the "generic criticism of *apologia*."¹⁴⁰ In this essay, the authors borrowed terminology from the field of psychology in identifying four "modes of resolution" or common strategies that are used when an individual must explain or defend his or her actions: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence.¹⁴¹ Writers who responded to the events that occurred in Salem, including Increase and Cotton Mather, John Hale, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, adopted very different apologetic strategies in constructing a new terministic screen for Americans living after the era of witchcraft trials who needed some way to cope with and explain the crisis that had unfolded in Salem.

PUBLIC MEMORY

Bradford Vivian argues that "every attempt to preserve a static memory, in whatever form, occurs in relation to some form of forgetting."¹⁴² Thus, a memory must be forgotten for a period of time if a rhetor is to be able to capitalize on the full amount of power that public memories offer to the present. In many ways, Americans living in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have forgotten about the "Salem witch" who worked with and/or for Satan in a cosmic battle for the souls of humanity. Yet, if you ask most fifth grade history

students to name any witchcraft related episode in American history, you would likely hear about the Salem witch trials.

While many Americans are familiar with the epidemic of widespread “hysteria” that seized control of Salem Village and led to the execution of twenty “witches,” they are not as familiar with the historical influences that contributed to this crisis. Indeed, for most modern Americans, the topic of witchcraft carries with it a variety of assumptions and misconceptions that have been established through generations of combining historical fact, folklore, popular mythology, and more recently, media dramatizations into the stereotypical figure that Americans today would recognize as a “Hollywood” or “Halloween” witch. To this end, my analysis in Chapter IV will focus on examining the public memory of the Salem trials to address the questions: “how have rhetorical artifacts remembered and distorted the historical events of the Salem witchcraft crisis, and what conclusions do these artifacts draw about how Americans understand witchcraft and the witch trials today?”

A Final Thought

In discussing the role that rhetoric plays in constructing terministic screens, Burke argues that

speech in its essence is not neutral. Far from aiming at suspended judgment, the spontaneous speech of a people is loaded with judgments. It is intensely moral – its names for object contain the emotional overtones which give us the cues as to how we should act toward these objects. . . . Spontaneous speech is not a naming at all, but a system of attitudes, of implicit exhortations. To call a man a friend or an enemy is *per se* to suggest a program of action with regard to him. An important ingredient in the meaning of such words is precisely the attitudes and acts which go with them.¹⁴³

As this brief overview has shown, an examination of the rhetorical construction of even *one* event highlights the moral and emotional nature of language. The rhetors who developed each of the texts I will discuss each framed the term “witch” and/or the events of the Salem witchcraft crisis in an attempt to persuade their audience to adopt a certain belief or take some form of action. Roger Gatchet sums up the goal of this study well when he argues that “such a complex and changing symbol [the witch] . . . has *rhetorical* power – it may serve as a site of identification, shape worldviews, or articulate certain understandings of gender, race, and class. The question one must ask, then, is what sort of rhetorical work is getting done when someone is called a witch?”¹⁴⁴

Notes

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CHAPTER II

CONSTITUTIVE RHETORIC:

SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE SALEM WITCHCRAFT CRISIS

It is a relation made by David of an encounter by him once met withal in 1 Samuel 17:34. Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and here came a lion and took a lamb out of the flock. There is an horrid lion by which your fools are pursued and endangered: This lion fetched away, after a very dismal manner, one, that was with us, when this flock was last before the Lord; and he seeks, he longs he roars, in that or some way to make a prev of all. I am keeping my father's sheep, and would labour to resene from the hellish lion every lamb that may lie in his way. Accept therefore the text now read, as, the warning of the Lord.

Cotton Mather, "A Discourse on the Power and Malice of the Devils"¹

Severely were the early colonists punished if they ventured to criticize or disparage either the ministers or their teachings, or indeed any of the religious exercises of the church.

Alice Morse Earle, *The Sabbath in Puritan New England*²

In 1975, Michael C. McGee argued that as a group, rhetoricians had "tended not to recognize the significance of [their] own concepts in describing man's social condition."³

He endeavored to solve this problem by highlighting a variety of ways in which the study of rhetoric impacted both the identity and behavior of society, and vice versa. Although McGee certainly drew several important conclusions in his article, the questions he raised and ideas he discussed have lived far beyond their initial publication. Indeed, McGee's work served as a spark that quickly ignited an entire genre of rhetorical study known today as constitutive rhetoric. A brief excerpt from Stokes' 2005 analysis of the rhetoric of the

Metabolife Corporation illustrates how McGee's influence was still evident in constitutive rhetoric scholarship thirty years after his own analysis of "The People." In outlining the theoretical framework for her study, Stokes argued that, "even as we communicate to win resources, our choices collectively establish norms that govern communicative practice."⁴

Indeed, over the past thirty-five years, dozens of scholars have investigated the power of rhetoric in an attempt to understand the ways in which "discourse . . . gains its constitutive power because it is a part of [the] rhetoric of socializations; it invites audiences to accept preexisting sets of relations and subject positions."⁵ My work in this chapter is grounded in conclusions drawn by a wide variety of constitutive rhetoric scholars, but two deserve particular attention here before I begin my review of both the history and current state of this field. First, as Radwan argues, "subjects are not preexistent; instead, they are called into being by rhetorical appeals that create identities or positions for people to adopt and occupy."⁶ And secondly, as Stokes contends, "rhetors shape culture through the success or, occasionally, failure of their efforts. Constitutive rhetoricians thus argue that what counts as good communication is often developed through what is accepted as good communication."⁷ As I will illustrate in my analysis, these two tenets, that constitutive rhetoric creates identities and shapes cultures, lie at the core of my rhetorical explanation for the Salem witchcraft crisis.

A Survey of the Field of Constitutive Rhetoric

Those who discuss constitutive rhetoric proceed from the basic premise that the *way* someone talks about a topic is as important as, and perhaps inseparable from, the content of what she says. Every author creates a relationship or community between herself, her reader and the people and ideas she writes about. This role is the *ethos* of Greek rhetoric, a persona worthy of being believed and a claim of veracity.

Kenneth L. Schneyer, "Talking About Judges, Talking About Women"⁸

A significant portion of the work surrounding constitutive rhetoric focuses on the role of language in creating national identities that bind together large groups of people who come from diverse situations and have few connections with one another outside of the collective identity they assume as citizens of the same country.⁹ Although these studies have drawn a multitude of important conclusions about the ways in which nations are created and function (in the words of Benedict Anderson) as "imagined communities," these ideas are not the focus of this project.¹⁰ Indeed, in examining the role that rhetoric played in priming Salem Village for the crisis situation they would face in 1692-1693, I will be looking at a small, tight knit community in which most individuals knew and had relationships with one another. One of the unique facets of my analysis in the second half of this chapter is that I use the theoretical framework of constitutive rhetoric to understand one of the reasons why a specific community became involved in a terrifying crisis that other similar communities who endured the same type of conditions, during the same time period, were able to avoid.

Thus, the following overview of the field of constitutive rhetoric will discuss both the theoretical development of this area of study, and some of the ways in which these theories have been applied to discover how groups construct communal identity through their words. I will not, however, focus on how an understanding of constitutive rhetoric is integral to the construction of national identity. Instead, I will focus on how this theoretical framework can be used to specifically understand the role that rhetoric played in setting the stage for the Salem witchcraft crisis. As such, this review of literature will move chronologically from Kenneth Burke's analysis of the power of rhetoric, to the early theoretical work done by Michael McGee, James Boyd White, and Maurice Charland, before finally examining some of the more recent scholarship that has focused on specific topic areas of constitutive rhetoric that are uniquely valuable to my project.

BURKE: RHETORIC AS ACTION

Burke argues that understanding and interpreting human action is a uniquely complex undertaking because individuals are fundamentally "symbol-using, symbol-making, and symbol-misusing animals."¹¹ In further examining this conclusion, he asks:

What is our "reality" for today (beyond the paper-thin line of our own particular lives) but all this clutter of symbols about the past combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, newspapers, and the like about the present . . . the whole overall "picture" is but a construct of our symbol systems.¹²

Thus, Burke clearly contends that the "reality" of human action is primarily constructed through our use of symbols. Although these symbols can take a variety of forms, he specifically argues that "language is a species of action, symbolic action – and its nature is such that it can be used as a tool."¹³ Therefore, Burke argues that examining the human use

of language is an especially important enterprise for critics who seek to understand what motivates individuals to act. Although Burke arrived at this conclusion about the importance of language rather early in his academic life, he spent virtually the rest of his career developing a methodology for decoding and understanding the use of language as symbolic action. In writing about this process, Burke argues that the critic's quest to glean meaning from the human use of language-as-action is complicated by two factors.

The first of these is the fact that most individuals hold "a kind of naïve verbal realism that refuses to realize the full extent of the role played by symbolicity in [his or her] notions of reality."¹⁴ Thus, Burke would have us conclude that although the use of symbolic language fundamentally influences human action, a majority of people are simply not willing to accept the fact that the rhetorical discourse they expose themselves to effectively constructs their reality. To illustrate this fact, Burke invites his readers to consider "just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by 'reality' has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems."¹⁵ Indeed, he notes that if we destroyed our books (or today perhaps we could add Internet and computer files), we would be left with little knowledge "about history, biography, even something so 'down to earth' as the relative position of seas and continents"¹⁶ because all of this information is stored and transmitted through our linguistic symbols.

Ultimately, although most individuals would deny that language constructs their reality, Burke argues that scholars can learn a great deal about human action through an analysis of popular rhetorical discourse from the period under critical investigation. This claim is critical to the analysis in this chapter because I will frame my work around Burke's

contention that examining a community's influential rhetorical artifacts aids the critic in drawing conclusions about that society's motivation. In this case, I will argue that a more complete understanding of Increase Mather's *Illustrious Providences*, Cotton Mather's *Memorable Providences*, and two of Samuel Parris' sermons on witchcraft, allows modern readers to craft a uniquely rhetorical explanation for the Salem witchcraft crisis.

Secondly, Burke contends that understanding human action is challenging because "the experiences of actual life do not have the simplicity of laboratory experiments . . . but [present] very complex matters for interpretation."¹⁷ Thus, Burke would have us conclude that discovering what motivated an individual to act requires a critic to search for more than a simple cause and effect relationship between a catalyst and its corresponding action. In his introduction to Burke's *Permanence and Change*, Hugh Dalziel Duncan explains that Burke believes this complexity results largely from the fact that "the human condition is a condition of imperfect communication, and we solve our problems in society as best we can through recalcitrant and mystifying symbols that cause the problems we must yet solve if we are to act together at all."¹⁸ Therefore, Burke urges critics to understand that human use of linguistic symbols is inherently complex because our "mystifying" system of language essentially creates the problems it must also be used to solve.

With these challenges in mind, Burke developed Dramatism as a methodology for critics seeking to understand the role of language in constructing reality. He defines Dramatistic analysis as a method that is "designed to show that the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives is via a methodical inquiry into cycles or clusters of terms and their functions."¹⁹ In his *Grammar of Motives*, Burke notes that the

title of this methodology “invites one to consider the matter of motives in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action.”²⁰ Thus, by engaging in Dramatistic analysis, rhetorical scholars seek to understand human motivation through a systematic analysis of language as a form of action. To this end, I will examine each of the texts in the second half of this chapter as more than mere words on a page. My analysis is based on the assumption that influential rhetorical works about witchcraft in the years immediately preceding Salem’s crisis actively constructed both the community’s understanding of the truth and reality of practicing witchcraft, and how they should respond to the threat that such ungodly activities posed.

Burke notes that, in utilizing the representative anecdote of drama, he has “made a selection in the realm of *action*, as against the scientific reduction to sheer *motion*.”²¹ This distinction is fundamental to understanding how Burke views the role of language, because he bases his framework of Dramatism on the argument that the capacity for symbolic action distinguishes humans from animals and natural elements. To this end, he writes that “‘action’ is a term for the kind of behavior possible to a typical symbol-using animal (such as man) in contrast with the extrasymbolic or nonsymbolic operations of nature.”²² Thus, Dramatism requires critics to focus on the actions individuals take through their linguistic choices.

At the root of this methodology is Burke’s assumption that “the key term ‘act’ . . . is a terministic center from which many related considerations can be shown to ‘radiate,’ as though it were a ‘god-term’ from which a whole universe of terms is derived.”²³ Thus, Burke would have the rhetorical critic isolate the action under investigation as a

“terministic center” and then identify and examine the “radiating” terms that key rhetors have used to discuss that action. He argues that this type of analysis aids the critic in discovering what motivates specific human action because

action requires programs – programs require vocabulary. To act wisely, in concert, we must use many words. . . . We must name the friendly or unfriendly functions and relationships in such a way that we are able to do something about them. In naming then, we form our characters, since the names embody attitudes; and implicit in the attitudes there are the cues of behavior.²⁴

Thus, Burke argues that a Dramatistic analysis of the language a rhetor uses to speak about an action is essential to understanding what motivated individuals to take that action.

I will approach my examination of the primary texts in the second half of this chapter as an opportunity to understand the motives and attitudes that created, or constituted, the Puritan community in Salem Village in the years prior to its witchcraft crisis.

McGEE, WHITE, AND CHARLAND: THEORIZING ABOUT RHETORIC AS CONSTITUTIVE

Scholars in the fields of rhetoric, English, and communication have built upon Burke’s initial development of Dramatistic analysis in an attempt to understand how the power of language has been used to create, shape, and transform communities. Specifically, McGee, White, and Charland frame their work around Burke’s discussion of action because, as Morus argues, “if constitutive narratives were merely stories of the past they could be dismissed as unimportant. Orientation toward action gives these narratives their force.”²⁵

McGee deserves a significant amount of credit for issuing the call to action that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that asked rhetoricians to seriously consider the ways in which language impacts society. In this same article, he also laid an important foundation for the study of constitutive rhetoric by arguing that the words a group uses to describe themselves are connected in a vital and integral way to their actions. More specifically, McGee contends that

through the analysis of rhetorical documents (particularly political myths), it should be possible to speak meaningfully, not of one's own, but of *the people's* repertory of convictions, not as they ought to be, but as they *are* (or have been). When a writer works with rhetorical documents, he sees material forces, events, and themes in history *only as they have already been mediated or filtered by the Leader whose words he studies* (italics in original).²⁶

My analysis of Puritan religious texts published and delivered in the years preceding the witchcraft crisis draws significantly from this aspect of McGee's work. I will argue that by examining the discourse of the religious leadership of this small, rural community, scholars can discover an important link between the Puritan understanding of witchcraft and the actions taken by the residents of Salem Village from 1692-1693.

Ten years after McGee's article was published, James Boyd White wrote *When Words Lose Their Meaning*, a text that built on McGee's call for further exploration of the connection between rhetoric and social behavior. At the beginning of his book, White focuses specifically on the methodology of analyzing rhetoric constitutively. He suggests that scholars should ask four questions when they examine any piece of discourse.

1. How is the world of nature defined and presented in this language?
2. What social universe is constituted in this discourse, and how can it be understood?

3. What are the central terms of meaning and value in this discourse, and how do they function with one another to create patterns of motive and significance?
4. What forms and methods of reasoning are held out here as valid?²⁷

Each of these questions brings up an important consideration that is integral to understanding how rhetoric helped to set the stage for the Salem witchcraft crisis.

Therefore, my analysis in the second half of this chapter will touch on the role of the natural world, the social structure of Puritan New England, the values of this religious community, and the arguments and strategies that several influential ministers utilized to persuade their congregants to believe and act in a specific way.

Although a majority of White's text is focused on the political and national identity of groups, he does make a second argument about the persuasive nature of constitutive rhetoric that is particularly applicable to my work here. In writing about Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, White argues that "it cannot be enough for [Burke] to secure the reader's intellectual assent to the truth of certain propositions, for he must have active belief, commitment, and participation."²⁸ In the same way that Burke wanted his British readers to think about and react to the French Revolution in a specified manner, the Puritan ministers whose texts I will analyze later in this chapter wanted their audience members to both think a certain way about alleged acts of witchcraft, and take specific, prescribed actions to deal with the escalating situation. Thus, I will rely heavily on White's insistence that constitutive rhetoric is influential to both the minds and actions of a community.

A few years after the release of *When Words Lose Their Meaning*, Maurice Charland wrote, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Québécois,” which is often considered the seminal work on the study of constitutive rhetoric within the field of communication. He drew from the work of scholars who had begun this line of study before him, including Burke and McGee, to examine the rhetoric of the Mouvement Souveraineté-Association during their 1967 campaign to obtain political sovereignty for Quebec. Charland relies heavily on Burke’s use of the term identification in explaining the goal of his project, arguing that

much of what we as rhetorical critics consider to be a product or consequence of discourse, including social identity, religious faith, sexuality, and ideology is beyond the realm of rational or even free choice, beyond the realm of persuasion. . . . Such identifications are rhetorical, for they are discursive effects that induce human cooperation. They are also, however, logically prior to persuasion. Indeed, humans are constituted in these characteristics; they are essential to the “nature” of a subject and form the basis for persuasive appeals. Consequently, attempts to elucidate ideological or identity-forming discourses as persuasive are trapped in a contradiction; persuasive discourse requires a subject-as-audience who is already constituted with an identity and within an ideology.²⁹

These contentions are key to the approach I am taking to understanding the events of the Salem witchcraft crisis, because my argument in this chapter is grounded in the idea that the Puritan identity maintained by the residents of Salem Village is an important component in understanding how and why these individuals responded to the threat of witchcraft in the manner that they did. Thus, my analysis in this chapter will focus on understanding how both the identity and the ideology of these individuals were rhetorically constituted by religious leaders in the years leading up to the crisis.

Before moving on to examine how other scholars have built upon these foundational works, I feel that it is important to touch on how White and Charland's understanding of the persuasive nature of constitutive rhetoric work together. On first glance, it might seem that these two scholars contradict one another when White argues that constitutive discourse asks for both the belief and participation of its readers, while Charland claims that such rhetoric shapes the identity of its audience, but exists prior to any persuasive calls to action. However, an examination of the conclusion to Charland's article helps to create some cohesiveness between these two arguments. He argues that, "because the constitutive nature of rhetoric establishes the boundary of a subject's motives and experience, a truly ideological rhetoric must rework or transform subjects."³⁰ Clearly, the "reworking" and "transforming" of subjects does not come without persuasion. Indeed, I argue that both White and Charland understand constitutive rhetoric as a type of discourse that is inherently persuasive, asking readers and audiences to adopt an identity that cannot be separated from the set of actions that accompany a group's value system.

Therefore, my analysis of the texts in the second half of this chapter will look at the writing and preaching of influential Puritan ministers as a form of rhetoric that called upon colonials to adopt a strict sense of religious identity that came with an inseparable collection of both beliefs and actions. Without a doubt, these appeals were persuasive. Indeed, they asked the residents of Salem Village, and the larger Puritan community of Massachusetts as a whole, to accept specific clusters of convictions about and responses to the threat of witchcraft. However, these persuasive appeals were not the ones that actually instigated the witchcraft crisis. Instead, these texts constituted a community with a deeply

rooted value system that stood primed for crisis when the accusations, trials, and executions began to escalate. Thus, without the rhetorical work that created and transformed a community, the persuasive appeals that asked the residents of Salem to support the convictions and executions of accused witches during the height of the witchcraft trials would likely not have been as effective as history has unfortunately proven they were.

SPECIFICALLY RELEVANT ASPECTS OF CONSTITUTIVE RHETORIC

Many recent scholars in the field of rhetoric are using the basic principles established by early scholars such as Burke, McGee, White, and Charland to examine a growing variety of texts from a constitutive perspective. For example, Jolanta A. Drzewiecka has conducted groundbreaking work on the role of constitutive rhetoric in diasporic collectivities. She argues that, even in less than stable social conditions, “constitutive discourses both defy and mobilize fixed categories to create persuasive invitations to join collective constructions.”³¹ Additionally, her examination of this unique application of rhetoric concludes that, “in effect, constitutive discourse creates a particular collective identity to legitimate particular ways of collective life by transcending individual differences.”³²

Work such as this has led to numerous valuable insights and arguments about the nature of discourse in shaping a group’s identity. Thus, before beginning my own analysis, I will examine four specific topics developed in these recent studies that will be of particular importance to my analysis in the second half of this chapter: the transient nature of constitutive rhetoric, the use of constitutive rhetoric in religious contexts, the ways in

which constitutive rhetoric has been proven to legitimize violence, and the unique power of narratives within constitutive discourse.

The Transient Nature of Constitutive Rhetoric

McGee argues that the collective political identity of a group cannot be created without the agreement and consent of the members of that group. Indeed, he argues that “so long as ‘the people’ believe basic myths, there is unity and collective identity. When there is no fundamental belief, one senses a crisis which can only be met with a new rhetoric, a new mythology.”³³ Although McGee is specifically discussing constitutive rhetoric within a political context in this passage, the conclusions about the power that rhetoric holds to construct collective identity are certainly not limited to that single aspect of social life.

Indeed, I argue that the need for members to “buy in” to their group’s identity myth is especially relevant to the examination of religious identity because these groups rely so heavily on faith and belief for their overall success. This was particularly true for Puritan New England in the years preceding the Salem witchcraft crisis because the acceptance of this group’s value system asked for a significant degree of commitment from the colonials who decided to identify themselves with this specific religious moment. Religious history scholar David D. Hall offers the following summary of the types of actions and beliefs Puritan ministers expected of their congregants:

The way to Christ was never “easy.” It demanded that people change how they behaved in the world, giving up their lawlessness and becoming disciplined servants of God. Beginning with the Ten Commandments, the God of the Puritans prescribed moral rules for the faithful to observe. Other rules flowed from Puritan objections to traditional calendar customs

and popular or court culture, practices such as playing sports on Sundays, Maypole celebrations, “mixed” dancing, and attending the theater. . . . But as Winthrop also remarked the real challenge was to transform the inner self, the unredeemed and rebellious ‘heart’ that, because of its sinful cast, rebelled against God.³⁴

The success of such a rigid system, filled with strict rules certainly required that each Puritan man, woman, and child maintained a wholehearted faith that their values and behaviors were of utmost importance in their quest to spread the message of God in the New World, and in turn, avoid eternal damnation.

And, as history has illustrated countless times though the rise and fall of societies and nations around the world, the popularity and influence of the Puritans’ collective identity did not last forever. Like so many groups that had gone before it, the Puritans were only able to function while their members accepted their dominant rhetorical identity narratives. For, as McGee argues

“the people” are more *process* than *phenomenon*. That is, they are conjured into objective reality, remain so long as the rhetoric which defined them has force, and in the end wilt away, becoming once again merely a collection of individuals (italics in original).³⁵

However, the texts examined in the second half of this chapter were successful in constituting a powerful narrative of identity during the decades leading up to Salem’s witchcraft crisis when the Puritan way of life thrived in Salem Village and throughout the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Thus, my analysis will seek to understand how four specific rhetorical texts constructed an identity that was powerful enough to motivate otherwise pious individuals to react to gossip and allegations with suspicion, torture, and even murder.

Constitutive Rhetoric in Religious Contexts

In his 1961 *Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke makes the following argument about the power that language holds for religious groups.

And insofar as men “cannot live by bread alone,” they are moved by doctrine, which is to say, they derive purposes from language, which tells them what they “ought” to want to do, tells them how to do it, and in the telling goads them with great threats and promises, even unto the gates of heaven and hell.³⁶

The Biblical reference Burke makes here is to the story of the temptation of Jesus that is recorded in the fourth chapter of the book of Matthew. In this story, Jesus is led into the desert “by the Spirit” and fasts for forty days before Satan comes to tempt him. Knowing that he is hungry, the Devil asks, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread,” and Jesus replies, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”³⁷ Through both his scriptural reference and his own reasoning, Burke makes a valid point about the power of language to constitute the reality of individuals who identify themselves as Christians.

Jon Radwan draws a similar conclusion about the important role that language plays in creating the collective identity of religious groups in his analysis of the constitutive power of the contemporary Christian song, “Jesus Freak.” He argues that “it is impossible to see oneself as a Christian (an identity or subject position) before one has engaged rhetorical texts (such as the Bible, sermons, or songs) that distinguish Christians from non-Christians and demonstrate the virtues of acting like, and thereby becoming, the one rather than the other.”³⁸ Although Radwan makes an excellent point about the power of rhetoric within

religious communities, Nathaniel Cordova extends this argument to specifically explain the power of “religious language.” He writes that

religious language was a means to unify people, to bring them together as participants in a community united by belief in a common creed, by communion with the same transcendent substance. Religious appeals are among the most powerful forms of identification because religious language makes connections to values and beliefs, to vision, to hopes and promises that are rooted in the life of a community of believers. Moreover, religious identifications create a common space and time for believers that unites them in a wholly different order, a world “saturated with being,” unlike that of the secular world.³⁹

In my analysis, I will argue that Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and Samuel Parris relied on a uniquely powerful tool when they used language, and specifically the religious language that Cordova described, to construct an identity for the New England Puritans that specifically dealt with the existence and practice of witchcraft.

The Use of Constitutive Rhetoric to Legitimize Violence

Both Drzewiecka, in her examination of diasporic groups, and Morus, in her analysis of the rhetoric of Slobodan Milosevic, discuss how constitutive rhetoric has been used to legitimize instances of violence. This specific, yet important topic is connected in interesting ways to the events that unfolded in Salem from 1692-1693. Although these three situations were very different, each “offers evidence that mythic narratives embedded in constitutive discourses can be used as a part of an agenda to normalize violence.”⁴⁰

In Salem Village, this occurred as religious and political leaders used rhetorical artifacts to convince pious Puritan congregants that the imprisonment, and even murder of individuals was warranted, “normal,” and even righteous, if it was done in pursuit of Satan. In this way, as Drzewiecka argues, “social formations are articulated through relations of

dominance and subordination, which emerge through constant struggles between positions within the social field . . . Self and other ‘come into existence *in and through* relation to each other – if in contradictory and conflictual ways’” (emphasis in original).⁴¹

The Use of Narratives in Constitutive Rhetoric

One of the key components of both Increase and Cotton Mather’s texts on witchcraft was their heavy reliance on narrative evidence. Thus, because White argues that understanding the types of reasoning used in a text is integral to understanding how that text impacts society, it is essential to examine how these narratives were used constitutively. Charland argues that

narratives lead us to construct and fill in coherent unified subjects out of temporally and spatially separate events. This renders the site of action and experience stable. The locus of yesterday’s acts becomes that of today’s. Consequently, narratives offer a world in which human agency is possible and acts can be meaningful.⁴²

However, he was far from the first communication scholar to recognize the importance of the narrative form.

Indeed, Charland traces his understanding of storytelling to the work done a few years earlier by Walter R. Fisher, who developed the theoretical framework of the narrative paradigm. In his 1984 article, “Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm,” Fisher posits five “presuppositions” that he argues “structure the narrative paradigm.” These tenets are as follows:

1. Humans are essentially storytellers.
2. The paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communication is “good reasons” which vary in form among communication situations, genres, and media.

3. The production and practice of good reasons is ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character.
4. Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings.
5. The world is a set of stories which must be chosen among to live the good life in a process of continual recreation.⁴³

In summarizing these fundamental ideas, Fisher concludes that “in short, good reasons are the stuff of stories, the means by which humans realize their nature as reasoning-valuing animals.”⁴⁴

But Fisher doesn't simply argue that *all* stories have power. Rather, he contends that stories must fulfill two core requirements if they are to be used persuasively. First, they must have “narrative probability,” meaning that the story must be coherent and complete, and second they must possess “narrative fidelity,” or that the tale must “ring true with the stories [audience members] know to be true in their lives.”⁴⁵ Only when stories meet both of these conditions, as they undoubtedly were in the case of the Mathers' treatises on witchcraft, can they be used as a form of argument.

McGee also discusses the power of the narrative within constitutive rhetoric, but his discussion of this topic draws primarily from Ernest G. Bormann's work on fantasy themes. In his 1972 article, “Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality,” Bormann defines a fantasy theme as “a recollection of something that happened to the group in the *past* or a dream of what the group might do in the *future*” (italics in original).⁴⁶ Thus, Bormann argues that narratives, or fantasy themes, “help people transcend the everyday and provide meaning for an audience.”⁴⁷

Interestingly enough, Bormann relied on the Puritan rhetoric of the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a representative example of the ways in which fantasy themes have been used

as a powerful form of narrative persuasion. He describes the fantasy themes created by Puritan ministers as giving

every social and political action a sense of importance. Every intrusion of nature or of other communities upon their inner reality also was given added significance. A time of troubles such as a drought or an Indian raid became evidence of God's displeasure and served as a motive to drive the Puritans to higher effort and great striving to please God. The Puritan vision also gave meaning to each individual within the movement. The scenario places each member of the audience firmly in the role of protagonist.⁴⁸

After providing an interesting overview of Puritan religious rhetoric, Bormann argues that this group's rhetorical vision was predominantly comprised of two fantasy themes, "the pilgrim making his low, painful, and holy way, beset by many troubles and temptations," and "the Christian soldier fighting God's battles and overcoming all adversaries in order to establish the true Church."⁴⁹ Both of these narratives ran through the messages that the Mathers and Parris composed for their congregants about the threat of witchcraft.

Ultimately, there are two conclusions from Bormann and McGee's work that will be important to my analysis later in this chapter. First, in drawing upon Bormann's work, McGee writes that "such concepts as 'The People' may be strictly *linguistic* phenomena introduced into public argument as a means of 'legitimizing' a collective fantasy" (italics in original).⁵⁰ My arguments will draw significantly from this idea that the collective identity of Puritan New England was created and legitimized, at least in part, through the witchcraft narratives of influential ministers during the years leading up to the Salem crisis. Secondly, Bormann suggests that

the rhetorical vision of a group of people contains their drives to action. . . . Motives do not exist to be expressed in communication, but rather arise in the expression itself and come to be embedded in the drama of the fantasy

themes that generated and serve to sustain them. Motives are thus available for direct interpretation by a community of scholars engaged in rhetorical criticism.⁵¹

My analysis in the second half of this chapter is grounded firmly in this idea that the examination of rhetorical narratives and, I argue, constitutive rhetoric as a whole, can aid scholars in discovering why societies are motivated to act.

With each of these aspects of constitutive rhetoric in mind, I will now turn to my examination of the constitutive rhetoric crafted by three of Massachusetts' influential Puritan ministers during the 1680s and 1690s. The goal of this analysis is to illustrate how rhetorical artifacts crafted a powerful and unique collective identity for the Puritan residents of Salem Village that provided one layer of motivation for them to allow suspicion and fear to dominate their response to the witchcraft accusations that began to surface in their community in the early months of 1692.

Rhetorically Constituting a Community Primed for Crisis

As it is the interest of all Christians to consider the wondrous works of God, so it is the duty of all ministers to study those of His Words, with a peculiar application, at which His Works like hands in the margin thereof do point, with endeavours to make their hearers understand what lessons of the former the voices of the latter do more especially direct unto.

Cotton Mather, "A Discourse on Witchcraft"⁵²

Before my critical examination of these texts can begin, it is essential to gain some understanding of what the world around Salem Village in 1692 looked like from the perspective of the individuals who lived there. The Puritans established communities

throughout New England as part of what they perceived as “a cosmic struggle between God and Satan for control of the New World, and, by extension, for control of human history.”⁵³ As Hall argues, this divine purpose controlled literally every aspect of their lives, and to ensure that they were acting in accordance with God’s will, the Puritans “formulated an explicit covenant with God to obey his laws, as stipulated in the Bible and affirmed by tradition, to the letter.”⁵⁴ This covenant required all Puritans to live a “Godly” life through devotion to Bible study and prayer, attendance at lengthy church services that were held several times a week, and taking any measure necessary to avoid situations that might tempt them to sin.

But when it came to witchcraft, the Puritans found that Satan could be especially persuasive. While Puritan ministers clearly preached that using “folk magic” to prevent or cure the disastrous effects of witchcraft was essentially relying on the Devil’s tools, members of Puritan communities were often still tempted to do what they could to save their families and congregations from Satan’s control – even if this meant committing a sin. This inconsistency in thought motivated most Puritan ministers to write books and sermons as authoritative religious treatises that could answer some of the most highly contested questions about the outbreak of witchcraft in New England.

One interesting facet of many of these texts was the length to which Puritan ministers seemed prepared to go in order to distinguish their practices, beliefs, and faith from that of the Catholic Church. Indeed, at one point in his *Illustrious Providences*, Increase Mather acknowledged “that many innocent persons have been put to death under the notion of witchcraft, whereby much innocent blood hath been shed.”⁵⁵ However, he

quickly points out that the death of innocents has been especially prevalent “in Popish times and places.”⁵⁶ Thus, he was quick to remove as much responsibility as possible from Protestant leaders and lay it instead on the Catholic Church.

It is clear from historical accounts of the Salem witch trials that the sermons and writings of Puritan ministers did influence both political and judicial leaders during the crisis of 1692-1693. Indeed, in his *Legal History* of this event, Hoffer writes that “the close tie between ministerial and magisterial roles in New England also made the judges’ recourse to the ministers a natural step. . . . [because] the ministers were more than preachers and pastors. They were men of finely tuned and well-read intellects in a time when moral judgment and natural truths were not severed from each other.”⁵⁷

My analysis will examine the work of three of these men: Increase Mather’s *Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences*, Cotton Mather’s *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions*, and two of Samuel Parris’ sermons: “Christ Knows How Many Devils There Are” and “These Shall Make War with the Lamb.” The first two of these artifacts were selected for this study because of their influence on the members of the Salem community in the years preceding the witchcraft crisis. The two sermons delivered by Samuel Parris were selected because they are the only two lessons that Salem Village’s minister delivered during the period of the crisis for which we still have extant detailed outlines. But before delving into these texts, I will briefly introduce each of these men and their rhetorical artifacts.

BACKGROUND ABOUT THE PURITAN MINISTERS AND THEIR WORKS

Increase Mather

Increase Mather was arguably the most influential Puritan leader during the period immediately before the Salem witchcraft crisis, and his *Illustrious Providences* articulated many of the beliefs and arguments of the ministerial community that would heavily influence the events in Salem during 1692-1693. He served as the minister of the North Church in Boston from 1664 until his death in 1723, and his ordination as the leader of this prominent congregation lent him a significant degree of authority in religious matters. Mather wrote and published *Illustrious Providences* in 1684, less than ten years before the first witchcraft accusations were made in Salem. Although this work dealt with a variety of religious matters, Chapters V through VII focused more specifically on the issues surrounding witchcraft, demons, and apparitions – the same topics that would become central in the witchcraft crisis.

Certainly, some of the text's influence was a result of the notoriety of its author. However, *Illustrious Providences* was also widely respected as a significant contribution to the discussion of witchcraft because it effectively gathered, summarized, and articulated the Puritan perspective on over 1,600 years of popular and religious discourse about witchcraft into a few chapters that were easily accessed and understood by colonials in the late seventeenth century. As such, *Illustrious Providences* was filled with “non-artistic” proofs – testimony, examples, and arguments made by others that Mather incorporated into his text to support his ideas. These credible “experts” ranged from ministers and theologians who had written texts on related topics, to physicians who were often called upon to “diagnose”

a possessed individual, to poets and authors who had written stories about witchcraft episodes. Mather also relied heavily on revered theologians (such as St. Augustine) and a diversity of Biblical texts that dealt with the ways in which demons and witches worked on earth.

Most modern historians argue that Mather's *Illustrious Providences* was extremely well received, and that "the popular response to [this essay] made it into something of a best seller, at least by the standards of the times. [Indeed], during the first year after its release, the *Essay* was reprinted three times: twice in Boston by the noted publisher Samuel Green, and once in London by George Calvert."⁵⁸ Additionally, Stephen Foster points out that several of Mather's "clerical contemporaries" relied on this text in composing their own sermons about witchcraft and other preternatural events.⁵⁹

Cotton Mather

Five years after his father published *Illustrious Providences*, Cotton Mather wrote his own religious treatise on the topic of witchcraft, *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions*. Silverman notes that as "the first born son of a rising minister, the grandson of two famous ministers, and the nephew of five other ministers, there was no question but that [Cotton] would be raised for the ministry himself."⁶⁰ The younger Mather gave his first public sermon at the age of sixteen in his grandfather's church, but Robert Middlekauff argues that Cotton "pursued the pastoral work of the ministry" with more "dedication" than his father had. Although he served as the assistant minister of North Church once he completed his college education, and then took over for his father as minister of the congregation in 1685, Cotton could often be found in "the houses of

families where he comforted the sick, catechized children, and preached to private meetings of neighborhood societies.”⁶¹

Thus, it wasn’t surprising that when the Goodwin family from Boston began having trouble with witches and demons tormenting their three children in 1688, Cotton Mather went to personally minister to them in their home. But even after several months of prayer and the execution of the woman convicted for bewitching the children, thirteen-year-old Martha Goodwin was still troubled. Mather determined that he should take the girl into his own home so that he could attempt to help her further. However, as Levin writes, the well being of Martha was not Mather’s only concern. Indeed, the Puritan minister hoped “to observe her symptoms and the devils’ powers at length, and to accumulate ‘evidence and argument as a critical eye-witness to confute the Sadducism of this debauched age.’”⁶²

Mather succeeded in witnessing a great deal during the time he spent with the Goodwin children, and he described many of the events that took place in great detail in his *Memorable Providences*. Indeed, he devoted the first four-four pages of this text to a description and examination of the children’s symptoms and the actions that were taken to remove Satan’s hand from their lives. In his historical exploration of the *Intellectual Life of Colonial New England*, Samuel Eliot Morison suggests that

Mather’s vanity at this favorable outcome of his efforts was such that he rushed into print with *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts*, describing the Goodwin case, with all its symptoms in detail; and just as newspaper stories of crime seem to stimulate more people to become criminals, so *Memorable Providences* may well have had a pernicious power of suggestion in that troubled era.”⁶³

While Morison makes a valid point, and certainly supports my claim that *Memorable Providences* was an important rhetorical influence on the events that would unfold in Salem Village, the argument that I develop in this chapter purports that such an assessment of Mather's rhetorical influence on the events that would unfold in Salem is too simplistic. Indeed, I argue that *Memorable Providences* did not simply initiate a series of copycat events, but rather, that Mather's text played an integral role in *constructing* the underlying reality of witchcraft for the individuals living in Salem Village.

Samuel Parris

When Samuel Parris took over the role of minister in Salem Village in 1689, he became only the most recent individual to hold that post amidst controversy and dissention. In commenting about the three men who preceded Parris in ministering to the individuals in this rural community, Boyer and Nissenbaum write that "like James Bayley and George Burroughs before him, Deodat Lawson made a timely and voluntary exodus from the welter of conflicting interests of which he found himself the unwitting center."⁶⁴ Indeed, in assuming Lawson's post, Parris soon found himself at the center of the most dangerous and divisive controversy that Salem Village had ever faced.

Hoffer explains that Parris' "family were London merchants and members of a radical Protestant sect. These Puritans . . . all believed that bishops, the mass, and all other remnants of Roman Catholic worship had to be purged from English pulpits."⁶⁵ But by the late 1660s, Samuel's family had relocated to pursue business opportunities in Barbados. He moved to Boston in 1670 where he remained and studied at Harvard for a few years, but left school after his father's death in 1673 and returned to Barbados. But Parris did not

stay long, deciding to return to Boston with his slaves, Tituba and Indian John, in the late 1670s. For the first several years after he settled in Massachusetts, Parris continued to explore his options as a businessman, but in the mid-1680s, he made the decision to return to the religious education he had received at Harvard and pursued ministry opportunities, which eventually led to his ordination as the minister of the congregation in Salem Village.

Although Parris never completed his formal education, and was certainly not highly qualified academically, the messages he delivered to the Puritans in Salem Village were undoubtedly influential in constructing their beliefs about witchcraft. Not only was Parris the local minister, charged with the instruction and edification of his congregants, but the first symptoms of witchcraft, and one of the first witches to be accused, tried, and executed would both be found in his own home. Thus, from both a professional and a personal standpoint, Parris' sermons carried a great deal of weight with his parishioners.

As I mentioned previously, these two sermons were selected for analysis because they are the only two of Parris' presentations from immediately before or during the witchcraft trials for which detailed outlines have survived. As Boyer and Nissenbaum note in their collection of primary documents from the Salem crisis, historians are only aware of three additional sermons that Parris gave during this time period. But the only information that remains about those is "a listing of the dates on which they were delivered and the Biblical texts on which they were based."⁶⁶

PRIMARY THEMES

Seventeenth century Puritan communities in New England were deeply committed to studying and following God's instructions for living a "holy life" that they read about in

Biblical texts and heard about in their ministers' sermons. But the dangers and difficulties that they faced daily in the New World meant that these American colonials had to exercise a significant degree of faith that their God would eventually reward their devotion and piety – either on earth or in heaven. Hebrews 11:1 from the New Testament of the Christian Bible illustrates how the Puritans defined the nature and power of their faith.

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.⁶⁷

Puritan ministers throughout New England played an integral role in developing this faith. For, as Hoffer argues, “the minister became the Lord’s messenger” whose responsibility it was “to make sense of a world coming apart.”⁶⁸

And, when it came to the presence of witchcraft in either a family or an entire community, the seventeenth century Puritans certainly did fear that their world was indeed coming apart. Thus, the arguments that the Mathers and Parris made about the nature and practice of witchcraft in the years leading up to Salem’s crisis helped Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony to construct and organize their ideas and beliefs about the reality of confederacy with the Devil. Morris Talpalar argues that Puritans believed

a constant struggle was going on between them and the devil, and each had cohorts in its support; yet the certainty of virtue triumphant permeated the moral style of the time – God is always stronger than the devil, and man took it for granted that the forces of God were dominant, and that it is inevitable for good ultimately to prevail over evil.⁶⁹

These ideas were clearly reflected in the two major themes that Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and Samuel Parris developed in their rhetorical discourse on witchcraft: just believe that witchcraft is real and just trust that God is in control.

Just Believe: Witchcraft is Real

There are [some] that acknowledge the existence of spirits, and that the bodies of men are sometimes really possessed thereby; who nevertheless will not believe there are any such woeful creatures *in rerum natura*, as witches, or persons confederate with the Devil.

Increase Mather, *Illustrious Providences*⁷⁰

Before these three men could hope to convince their readers and listeners to take specific actions in response to acts of witchcraft, they first had to prove to their Puritan audience that witchcraft was indeed real. As the quotation in this epigraph illustrates, Increase Mather defined a witch as someone who was working with and/or for Satan. In this way, he left the definition of witchcraft open to include all “magical” practices, regardless of the practitioner’s intentions. Like his son Cotton, Samuel Parris, and other Puritan ministers of his time, Increase Mather believed that the folk magic practiced in New England was a remnant of sinful pagan traditions that were rooted in satanic power.

But because it was common knowledge that these practices were widely used throughout New England, these ministers realized that convincing American colonials to seek God’s wisdom and assistance in dealing with unexplainable and uncontrollable events in their lives would not be a simple, one-step task. Therefore, in laying the groundwork for the call to action that comprises the second theme I will examine in this chapter, each of the ministers took care to persuade their readers and listeners that the Devil was indeed

active in the natural world around them. To develop this theme, these men presented their audience members with a significant amount of narrative evidence of preternatural events in New England, discussed the limitations of evil, persuaded their audience that the Devil was indeed a powerful creature, explained how to differentiate between the symptoms of possession and insanity, talked specifically about the existence of apparitions and spectres, and finally relied on logical argumentation to “prove” that witchcraft was indeed a real occurrence.

Narrative Evidence. As I discussed in my review of the scholarly work that has been conducted in the field of constitutive rhetoric, several scholars have focused their work on detailing the power of narratives. However, rhetoric and communication scholars are not the only individuals who have attested to the power of stories. Indeed, in his *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*, Walter Stephens explains that this reliance on narratives as a persuasive tool was a common component found in many witchcraft treatises written both in Europe and the American colonies during the Middle Ages and the early modern period. Stephens argues that stories were a uniquely powerful rhetorical tool in the hands of those leading and advising witchcraft trials, which

. . . became necessary because theories of sacramental efficacy were increasingly difficult to believe when stated in the scientific terms of Scholastic theology. . . . The translation from theory to narrative makes readers’ “willing suspension of disbelief” easier by engaging their emotions as well as their intellect. Narrative allows them to confront the theory indirectly rather than head-on. Readers’ energy can be concentrated on emotional stimuli . . .⁷¹

The Mathers were particularly interested in using narratives within their texts on witchcraft. Increase Mather spent virtually all of chapter five of *Illustrious Providences* (more

than twenty percent of the portion of the text devoted to witchcraft) providing his readers with seven specific narrative accounts of preternatural events that had taken place in New England. Cotton Mather shared his father's commitment to providing narrative evidence by supplying his readers with examples of virtually every argument posited in his treatise. However, it should be noted that he devoted fifty-three pages of *Memorable Providences* (approximately thirty-seven percent of the whole text) to detail his most exhaustive account – the story of the Goodwin family.

An overview of one of Increase Mather's stories will provide an example of how these men used narratives to argue that Satan was indeed working actively in New England through the actions of his human confederates – witches. This first narrative recounted the testimony of Ann Cole, "a person of real piety and integrity" from Hartford who began experiencing "strange fits" in which she spoke in a Dutch accent. Because she was not "familiarily acquainted with the Dutch," the local authorities believed that Ann Cole was a victim of demonic possession. Their prime suspect was a "lewd and ignorant woman, . . . in prison on suspicion for witch-craft" who confessed that she "had had familiarity with the Devil." As a further test of this woman's status as a witch, she was bound and "cast into the water" and "apparently swam after the manner of a buoy." Based on all of this evidence, the woman was eventually executed. Mather concluded this story by stating that "after the suspected Witches were either executed or fled, Ann Cole was restored to health, and has continued well for many years, approving her self a serious Christian."⁷²

As I stated earlier, Cotton Mather's cornerstone narrative, the account of the Goodwin family, comprised the first fifty-three pages of his *Memorable Providences*. A few

highlights from his account of what happened to the Goodwin family easily illustrate how Mather used this rhetorical form as a means for constructing the Puritan understanding of the reality of witchcraft. First, Mather introduced a wide variety of different symptoms that the children faced. He recorded that

sometimes they would be deaf, sometimes dumb, and sometimes blind, and often, all this at once. One while their tongues would be drawn down their throats . . . they would have their mouths opened unto such a wideness, that their jaws went out of joint . . . they would make most piteous out-cries, that they were cut with knives, and struck with blows that they could not bear.⁷³

Eventually, the children's parents accused one of their neighbors, a woman named Glover, of being the witch who was tormenting their children. Mather detailed her interrogation and recorded that on the way to her execution, Glover said that "the children should not be relieved by her death, for others had a hand in it as well as she."⁷⁴ And accordingly, Mather wrote that the children continued to be tormented after the woman had been killed.

Approximately half-way through this extended narrative, Mather shifted the focus of his story from what happened to the entire Goodwin family to what he witnessed when he brought the eldest child, Martha, into his own home in an attempt to cure her of her possession. He noted that she continued to face many of the same afflictions that she had in the past, but recorded the ways in which he tried to prevent and/or stop the devils from tormenting her. Mather reported that when she was "in her frolics," he attempted to read the Bible, but when he did, "her eyes would be strangely twisted and blinded, and her neck presently broken."⁷⁵ This type of event escalated until, as Mather wrote,

the young woman had two remarkable attempts made upon her, by her invisible adversaries. Once, they were dragging her into the oven that was

then heating, while there was none in the room to help her . . . [and] another time, they put an unseen rope with a cruel noose about her neck, whereby she was choked until she was black in the face.⁷⁶

Finally, after recording that his patience and faith in God had eventually sent the Devil away from Martha, Mather wrote that as a result of this experience, he would “count down-right impudent” anyone who doubted the existence of devils or witches since they had “such palpable convictions of” them.⁷⁷ Indeed, this was not only his personal conviction, but also the argument that he hoped to make through the abundance of narrative evidence he provided his readers about what had happened to the Goodwin family.

The Power of the Devil. This portion of the first theme was a critical aspect of the ultimate goals of Puritan ministers who wrote and/or spoke on the topic of witchcraft in the second half of the seventeenth century. According to Puritan witchcraft theory, the Devil was the source and mastermind of all magical and occult-related activity. Religious leaders understood that fear was a powerful weapon, and they took every opportunity they could to ensure that their congregants could not and would not underestimate the power of Satan. Thus, it is not surprising that all three rhetors took time to make sure that their readers and/or listeners understood the strength of their collective enemy.

Cotton Mather devoted an entire twenty-one page section of *Memorable Providences* to expounding upon the power of Satan. His primary thesis here was that “the Devil is a potent, a cruel, and a restless adversary to the souls of man.”⁷⁸ But he went on to argue that the Bible proved that devils “labour to do us all the mischief they can devise.”⁷⁹ Cotton claimed that there are three primary reasons why these devils are so powerful: their

nature (“they are spiritual, and therefore powerful”), their vast number (“there are far more evils than there are men in the world”), and their confederacies (“our wicked hearts will favour and humour the devils in their attempts, and betray us into their hands”).⁸⁰

Rather than developing more straightforward arguments as his son did, Increase Mather utilized his narratives to articulate some of the specific ways in which the Devil displayed his physical power over earthy objects and beings through episodes of witchcraft and possession. He accomplished this in two primary ways. First, readers of *Illustrious Providences* were bombarded with examples of Satan using voices and noises throughout all seven of Mather’s accounts. He often provided examples of demons or the Devil speaking through a person, but took special care to note that the possessed individual could not have actually been the one speaking. For example, in the account of Elizabeth Knap, Mather wrote that “sometimes words were spoken seeming to proceed out of her throat, when her mouth was shut. Sometimes with her mouth wide open, without the use of any of the organs of speech.”⁸¹

In other passages, he combined the possession of an individual’s voice with references to animals. For example, Mather wrote that one possessed child “made for a long time together a noise like a dog, and like a hen with her chickens, and could not speak rationally.”⁸² Mather also incorporated noises and voices as evidence of Satan’s actions. In describing the demonic haunting of William Morse’s house, he wrote that “they heard a scraping on the boards, and then a piping and drumming on them, which was followed with a voice, singing Revenge! Revenge! Sweet is Revenge!”⁸³ Finally, Mather provided his readers with examples of times when the Devil prevented a possessed individual from being

able to speak at all. At one point during her ordeal, Mather wrote that Elizabeth Knap had “her tongue for many hours together . . . drawn like a semicircle up to the roof of her mouth” and then later “she was taken speechless for some time.”⁸⁴ When all of these examples were considered together, Increase Mather made a compelling case that Satan was indeed powerful enough to control the human senses of sound and speech.

Secondly, Mather often highlighted the intensity and danger of episodes of possession by detailing Satan’s ability to defy gravitational forces. In the seven stories that made up the fifth chapter of *Illustrious Providences*, a wide array of objects were thrown “around” or “made to fly” as a display of Satan’s power. Often, Mather told his readers that Satan threw these objects toward individuals as a method of tormenting them. These included “stones and bricks,” an “iron crook,” “ashes and coals,” “a box and a board,” “a shoe,” “cow-dung,” “pot-lid,” “bed-clothes,” “a chamber pot with its contents,” and “cobs of Indian corn.”⁸⁵ These examples easily supported the argument that the Devil and his servants were not merely powerful, but desired to use their power to harm “Godly” men and women. But Increase Mather’s most intense example of Satan’s ability to move objects at will occurred during the story of William Morse. At one point, Mather wrote that Morse’s son “was pulled out of bed, and knocked vehemently against the bed-stead boards, in a manner very perilous and amazing.”⁸⁶

Because Samuel Parris’ sermon notes, and not the actual text of his sermons have survived, there is no way to know for sure exactly how much time he spent talking about each topic in his outline. However, we can assume that only major elements of his message would have been included in these notes. Thus, although Parris’ reference to Satan’s power

was brief, I would argue that it was an important component of his “War with the Lamb.”

In talking about the story of Job from the Old Testament of the Puritan Bible, Parris argued that “as God at first did but speak the word and it was done, so if the devil do but hold up his finger – give the least hint of his mind – his servants and slaves will obey.”⁸⁷

Although it provided a clear illustration of the Devil’s power on earth, the story of Job was referenced for several different purposes throughout these four artifacts. Thus, I will return to this scriptural text again in my analysis of the second theme.

The Limitations of Evil. Both Increase Mather and Samuel Parris found ways to assure their audience members that although Satan was powerful, there were specific limits to his power. However, these two men approached this topic in very different ways. Mather communicated his ideas about the limitations of Satan’s power through his discussion of human to animal transformation, an issue that was evidently a common element of consideration in discussions about witchcraft during this time period. He argued that this was one area where his readers could discover the limits of evil, as it was “extremely fabulous that witches can transform themselves or others into another sort of creatures . . . it is beyond the power of all the devils in hell to cause such a transformation; they can no more do it than they can be the authors of a true miracle.”⁸⁸

Mather contended that stories about this type of transformation could be attributed to one of two different explanations. First, he argued that some individuals who claimed to be able to transform into animals were in reality afflicted by “a sort of melancholy madness, which is call *Lycanthropia*, or *Lupina Insania*, . . . when men imagine themselves to be turned into wolves or other beasts.”⁸⁹ The second explanation came from a type of evil

possession. In these cases, Mather wrote that “the Devil may so impose upon the imagination of witches as to make them believe that they are transmuted into beasts.”⁹⁰ He provided his readers with an example of this type of possession through the narrative of a woman who was “in prison on suspicion for witchcraft; pretending to be able to turn herself into a wolf.”⁹¹ To prove this claim, the woman “anointed her head, neck and arm-pits” with some topical solution and “fell into a most profound sleep, for three hours.”⁹² When she woke, the woman claimed to have killed a sheep and cow. But the observers who had remained by her side knew that she had not gone anywhere since falling asleep. Thus, Mather concluded that “the Devil himself did that mischief, and in the mean time the witches who were cast into so profound a sleep by him, as that they could not by any noises or blows be awakened, had their fantasies imposed upon by dreams and delusions according to the pleasure of their master Satan.”⁹³

In his, “These Shall Make War with the Lamb,” Samuel Parris also argued that there were limitations to what Satan could accomplish. In this sermon, Parris’ primary theme was that the outbreak of witchcraft in New England should be viewed as an instance in which the Devil was at war with the lamb and his followers – in this case the Puritans living in Salem Village and its surrounding communities. Parris argued that although Satan would like for it to, there were three reasons why this war would not last forever.

1. Sometimes the devil loseth his volunteers in war.
2. Sometimes the devil is chained up. (God and his angels do this.)
3. After this life the saints shall no more be troubled with war from devils and their instruments.⁹⁴

By reminding their audiences of these limitations that God placed on Satan, both Increase Mather and Samuel Parris were establishing an important foundation for the arguments they would make in developing their second primary theme about God's control over humanity and the world in which they and their parishoners lived.

Possession vs. Illness. The topic of distinguishing episodes of possession from cases of illness was unique to Increase Mather's *Illustrious Providences*. In selecting and writing the seven accounts that comprised chapter five of his witchcraft treatise, Mather was conscious that some of his contemporaries were circulating the argument that demonic possession was not a real phenomenon. Instead, some scholars and theologians of his day argued that individuals once considered to be "possessed" were not under the control of Satan or his demons, but were actually exhibiting the symptoms of a physical or mental disease. Mather specifically identified Joseph Mede, a British scholar who had written a widely acclaimed commentary on Revelation, as a supporter of this argument. Mather wrote that "the excellently learned and judicious Mr. Mede, is of opinion, that the daemoniacks [sic] whom we read so frequently of in the New-Testament, were the same with epileptics, lunatics, and mad men."⁹⁵

With such credible support behind this line of reasoning, Increase Mather understood that the refutation of Mede's argument was essential to successfully persuading his readers that witchcraft was a real and dangerous spiritual phenomenon. However, he could not deny the fact that some individuals did suffer from physical and mental diseases that caused them to exhibit possession-like symptoms. Thus, Mather acknowledged that discerning between cases of insanity and episodes of possession was a difficult undertaking.

To aid his readers in determining the difference between these cases, Mather identified a list of six symptoms unique to episodes of possession that could be used to “discern between natural diseases and Satanical [sic] possessions.”⁹⁶

1. If the party concerned shall reveal secret things, either past or future, that without supernatural assistance could not be known . . .
2. If he does speak with strange languages, or discover skill in arts and sciences never learned by him.
3. If he can bear burdens, and do things which are beyond humane strength.
4. Uttering words without making use of the organs of speech, when persons shall be heard speaking, and yet neither their lips not tongues have any motion . . .
5. When the body is become [sic] inflexible.
6. When the belly is on a sudden puffed up and instantly flat again.⁹⁷

This list was critical to Increase Mather’s argument that witchcraft was a real phenomenon because these symptoms and the seven accounts that he presented in chapter five created a coherent meta-narrative of satanic or demonic possession. Because each of these symptoms was present in the stories he had already recounted, Mather’s formal discussion and informal narratives of possession reinforced one another. Thus, readers could gain clarity about how these symptoms manifested themselves in real situations through the narratives, and Mather could use his narratives as proof that these symptoms were legitimate indicators of possession.

Apparitions and Spectres. Although this topic was also only addressed by one of the three rhetors whose works are examined in this chapter, it is a particularly important aspect of the first theme because of the integral role that spectral evidence would play during the trials held in Salem from 1692-1693. In his *Illustrious Providences*, Increase Mather took on the task of proving that both good and evil apparitions and spectres have appeared to

humans, and further that Christians should fear these visions and not seek them out. This argument was complicated by the fact that Increase Mather told his readers that as he was writing this text, there had not been any confirmed cases of spectres or apparitions in New England. However, he did not want this fact to fool any of his readers into believing that such supernatural events were mythical. To this end, Mather argued that the fact “that spirits have sometimes really (as well as imaginarily) appeared to mortals in the world, is amongst sober men beyond controversy.”⁹⁸

To strengthen this conclusion, Mather provided his readers with an explanation for why spectres were less common in New England. He claimed that “in England, and Scotland, and in the united provinces, and in all lands where the reformed religion hath taken place, such things are more rare.”⁹⁹ He noted that Catholics believed their church members were more likely to encounter apparitions and spectres because Satan was “most afraid of losing” these individuals, but clearly disagrees with this conclusion.¹⁰⁰ Instead, Mather argued that Protestants received a greater degree of protection from demonic visions because of “the light of the gospel, and the power of Christ.”¹⁰¹ Again, Mather utilized his text about “remarkable providences” to clearly distinguish Protestants from Catholics and argue for the supremacy of Protestant belief, teaching, and practice.

Increase Mather also introduced several reasons why God allowed spectres and apparitions to appear on earth. He wrote that dead people often came back as apparitions to resolve some problem on earth that only they can fix. More specifically, Mather argued that these spectral events commonly occurred to reveal “some sin not discoverable in any other way. Either some act of injustice done, or it may be some murder committed.”¹⁰² He

provided his readers with several narrative accounts of times when individuals returned to solve inheritance disputes,¹⁰³ to ensure that land was properly given to the poor,¹⁰⁴ to accuse guilty parties of murder,¹⁰⁵ and to confess a murder committed in life.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, Mather argued that “sometimes the great and holy God, hath permitted, and by his providence order such apparitions to the end that atheists might thereby be astonished and affrighted out of their infidelity.”¹⁰⁷

Having thus established the reality of spectral events, Mather proceeded to discuss the difference between good and evil apparitions. He wrote that it was “sometimes very difficult to pass a true judgment of the spectres which do appear, whether they are good or evil angels, or the spirits of deceased men.”¹⁰⁸ To support this assertion, Mather provided both Biblical examples of “holy angels” and “lying demons” appearing to humans and real-life examples of spectral apparitions that came with both beneficent and detrimental intentions.¹⁰⁹ He complicated this distinction by arguing that Satan had sometimes masqueraded as a good spirit “and [carried] on a wicked design” by persuading “men unto great acts of piety.”¹¹⁰ Thus, he argued that Christians needed to take great care in dealing with apparitions because “Satan’s policy” was to gain “an advantage to take silly souls alive in his cruel snare.”¹¹¹ To achieve this goal, “the evil spirit [would] speak good words, so doth he sometimes appear in the likeness of good men, to the end that he may the more effectually deceive and delude.”¹¹² However, Mather reminded his readers that not all “such apparitions are diabolical. Only that many of them are so.”¹¹³ Because of the complexity inherent in determining whether a spectre was good or evil, he also provided instructions for how Godly men and women should react if they encountered such a being.

Thus, I will return to this topic in my discussion of the second major theme of Puritan witchcraft rhetoric later in this chapter.

Logical Argumentation. Finally, after supplying their audiences with a variety of narrative evidence and fear appeals, all three of the ministers turned to direct, logical appeals to ensure that their congregants were fully convinced of the existence of witchcraft. Cotton Mather specifically directed one of his strongest logical appeals in *Memorable Providences* toward individuals who did not believe in the reality of witchcraft. He presented a clear refutation of this belief by presenting a representative example of those who doubted the existence of witchcraft, and then proceeding to address their concerns logically.

It should next be proved that witchcraft is. The being of such a thing is denied by many that place a great part of their small wit in deriding the stories that are told of it. Their chief argument is, that they never saw any witches, therefore there are none. Just as if you or I should say, we never met with any robbers on the road, therefore there never was any padding there.¹¹⁴

The remainder of his answer went on to claim that the “testimony of scripture” and the “testimony of experience” proved that these doubters were incorrect.¹¹⁵

After firmly establishing the reality of possession and providing his readers with a variety of stories about episodes of witchcraft activity in New England, Increase Mather presented four arguments that asked his readers to rely on three separate forms of proof to verify that witchcraft was indeed real: Biblical authority, historical examples, and common sense. First, he wrote that because “the scripture makes particular mention of many that used those cursed arts and familiarities with the Devil,” witchcraft must be a real

phenomenon.¹¹⁶ Secondly, because history provided them with several examples of “known wizards” who “taught others what ceremonies they are to use in maintaining communion with devils,” Increase Mather insisted that his Puritan audience must believe that some individuals were truly in confederation with Satan.¹¹⁷

Third, because “there have been men who would discourse in languages, and reason notably about science which they never learned; who have revealed secrets, discovered hidden treasures, told whither stolen goods have been conveyed, and by whom; and that have caused bruit creatures, nay statues or images to speak, and give rational answers,” Mather argued that common sense required his readers to conclude that these individuals were witches because “such things as these cannot be done by the help of mere natural causes.”¹¹⁸ And finally, Mather reminded his readers that “there have been many in the world who have upon conviction confessed themselves guilty of familiarity with the Devil,” and these confessions alone proved that witchcraft was real.¹¹⁹

Although he didn’t spend as much time developing this type of argumentation as his father had, Cotton Mather did see the importance of presenting his readers with a strong logical argument about the reality of witchcraft. However, because the majority of his text was devoted to a variety of narratives, Mather relied on the logic of the four well-known New England Puritan ministers, Charles Morton, James Allen, Joshua Moodey, and Samuel Willard, to accomplish this task. These four men wrote the opening section of *Memorable Providences* that Mather titled, “To the Reader,” an introduction similar to a preface that we might see in a book today. These men essentially combined several of the ideas Increase Mather had dealt with in *Illustrious Providences* into a single line of reasoning that they used

to help introduce readers to the goals and themes they would read about in *Memorable*

Providences. The ministers argued that

it has also been made a doubt by some, whether there are any such things as witches, i.e. such as by contract or explicit covenant with the Devil, improve, or rather are improved by him to the doing of things strange in themselves, and besides their natural cause. But (besides that the word of God assures us that there have been such, and given order about them) no age passes without some apparent demonstration of it.¹²⁰

Thus, in one short passage, Cotton was able to address the concerns of those individuals who doubted the existence of witchcraft before his primary text even began by reminding his readers that both stories from the Bible and historical examples provided sufficient proof that witchcraft was indeed real.

Samuel Parris constructed an argument that fell in line with the reasoning of both the elder and younger Mathers in his “War with the Lamb.” He attempted to confirm the reality of witchcraft as an example of a spiritual war being fought on earth by comparing the events beginning to unfold in Salem Village to Biblical stories and European current events.

To this end, he wrote:

Yea, the scripture is full of such instances; church history abounds also with evidences of this truth. Yea, and in our days, so industrious and vigorous is the bloody French monarch and his confederates against Christ and his interest? Yea, and in our land – in this and some neighboring places – how many, what multitudes of witches and wizards, has the devil instigated with utmost violence to attempt the overthrow of religion?¹²¹

It is interesting to note that each of the ministers whose works are examined in this chapter drew at least part of their logical argumentation in favor of the existence of witchcraft from narrative sources – more specifically stories from the Bible, from history, and from current events. Thus, the communication theorists, the rhetoricians, and the scholars who work on

the history of witchcraft theory were correct. Narratives played a prominent role in helping Puritan religious leaders to constitute the values, beliefs, and as I will describe in my analysis of the second major theme, the actions of their audience members.

Increase Mather, who relied far more on logical reasoning than either his son or Parris, concluded his *Illustrious Providences* with one final argument that was aimed at refuting the claim that all suspected episodes of magic or witchcraft should actually be attributed to the actions of the insane. He drew on his earlier proofs of the reality of witchcraft to support his contention that there was no logical way his readers could still believe that witchcraft was a myth, or merely something devised to excuse the behavior of the insane. He argued that “it is a vain thing, for the patrons of witches to think that they can sham off this argument, by suggesting that these confessions did proceed from the deluded imaginations of mad and melancholy persons.”¹²²

The tone he used in this passage is especially important to note because his language here was much stronger than in the rest of the chapter, where he attempted to remain straightforward, factual, logical and largely devoid of emotion. Thus, the words that Increase Mather chose to make this argument revealed his passionate belief in the reality of witchcraft and offer an excellent example of how strongly these men were convinced that witchcraft was a reality, a *dangerous* reality that threatened both the lives of Christians on earth and the eternal fate of their souls after death.

Just Trust: God is in Control

Most true it is, that Satan and all his wicked angels are limited by the providence of God: so as that they cannot hurt any man or creature, much less any servant of his, without a commission from him, whose kingdom is over all.

Increase Mather, *Illustrious Providences*¹²³

While Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and Samuel Parris all clearly intended to frighten their readers by constructing their audience members' beliefs about witchcraft largely around the themes of belief and fear through elaborate narratives about the reality of satanic and demonic possession, these men did not leave their parishioners entirely without hope. Indeed, they developed the second primary theme of their texts around a source of optimism through six arguments. First, they reassured their listeners and readers that although witchcraft was a frightening and real physical manifestation of Satan's power to control natural forces and beings, God always remained more powerful than their enemy. Secondly, they argued that although humans may not be able to understand how episodes of witchcraft fit into God's plan, they undoubtedly have some heavenly purpose. Next, they provided specific instructions for how Godly men and women should deal with spectres if they were ever faced with such a situation. Fourth, the ministers appealed to their congregants to turn away from any and all practices of folk magic, and fifth, replace their desire to take immoral actions against witchcraft with a strong faith in God. And finally, they presented Puritan colonials with a strategic plan for controlling Satan's reign of terror in their lives – translating their faith into action through living upright lives and actively worshipping God.

God is More Powerful Than Satan. At the beginning of chapter six of *Illustrious Providences*, Increase Mather took great care to specifically remind his readers that God was more powerful than Satan. Although this was an integral part of the overall message of his text, he was far from the first religious leader to make this argument. Indeed, Stephens contends that “one of the main tasks of witchcraft theory was to demonstrate that God’s control over the physical and moral cosmos was perfect.”¹²⁴ In his version of this argument, Increase Mather claimed, as the previous epigraph illustrated, that despite the numerous examples of Satan’s power that he narrated in an earlier chapter, God would always be *more* powerful, because ultimately the Devil could only act with God’s permission. Because he understood that the assertion that God would grant Satan the power to harm individuals might seem puzzling to his readers, Mather reminded them that God possessed infinite wisdom and accordingly gave Satan such powers for “wise and holy ends” that humans might not fully comprehend.¹²⁵

Cotton Mather developed his argument about God’s power in a manner that was similar to the approach his father used in *Illustrious Providences*. But, rather than pen this claim himself, Mather’s readers first saw this idea in the “To the Reader” section written by Morton, Allen, Moody, and Willard. The ministers argued that “God is therefore pleased . . . to suffer devils sometimes to do such things in the world as shall stop the mouth of gainsayers, and extort a confession from them.”¹²⁶ Thus, Cotton Mather relied on both his own authority and the credibility of his peers to remind his readers that because God was more powerful than Satan, he must *permit* the devil to act, and because God’s knowledge was beyond human comprehension, Christians needed to trust him without question.

Finally, Samuel Parris also talked about this aspect of the second theme in his “War with the Lamb.” His sermon notes reveal that this message was an exposition of Revelation 17:14, which Parris wrote out at the beginning of his outline as: “these shall make war with the lamb, and the lamb shall overcome them: For he is the Lord and Lords, and king of kings.”¹²⁷ Parris devoted the first half of his sermon to discussing the nature of such a holy war. But with these basic ideas firmly established, he used the second half of his presentation to remind his listeners that regardless of how long this war lasted or how many casualties there were, God would ultimately be victorious. Indeed, he argued that deciding to work with Satan (which would occur if someone elected to participate in witchcraft related activities) “is to take the weakest side, [for] the lamb shall most certainly overcome.”¹²⁸

God Has a Plan. As in the previous section about God’s power, all three men touched on this topic at some point in their artifacts. Cotton Mather’s *Memorable Providences* provided the most concise overview of what the Puritans meant when they talked about God’s plan in relation to the topic of witchcraft. But once again, the four distinguished ministers who penned “To the Reader” were the actual authors of the argument. They wrote that

the secrets also of God’s providence, in permitting Satan and his instruments to molest his children, not in their estates only, but in their persons and their posterity too, are part of his judgment are past finding out; only this we have good assurance for, that they are among the all things that work together for their good. Their graces are hereby tried, their uprightness is made known, their faith and patience have their perfect work.¹²⁹

Thus, before Mather began presenting his own, more detailed information about witchcraft, his audience had already been warned that when it came to spiritual matters beyond human understanding (such as witchcraft), they should trust in the fact that God had a plan for all things. Indeed, the Puritan ministers all argued that because God was infinitely wiser than humanity, it was best to rely on his judgment rather than continuing their futile attempts to find an explanation for things that were beyond their control and understanding.

Increase Mather's discussion of this topic was far more detailed. He introduced the idea by providing two different answers to the common question: why God would allow Satan the power to harm and torment humanity? First, he argued that at times God allowed Satan to harm an individual "as a punishment for sin committed."¹³⁰ As proof of this claim, Mather returned to the account of George Walton that he had detailed in chapter five of *Illustrious Providences*. In presenting this story, Mather wrote that Walton himself suspected "that one of his neighbours has caused [his troubles] by witchcraft, she (being a widow-woman) chargeth him with injustice in detaining some land from her."¹³¹ Mather's response to this situation was that if Walton's sins were indeed the cause of his afflictions, he should "by confession and repentance . . . give glory to that God, who is able in strange ways to discover the sins of men."¹³²

Secondly, Increase Mather wrote that God does not only permit Satan to possess those who need to be punished, but that "such amazing afflictions may befall the righteous as well as the wicked in this world."¹³³ As proof that God did indeed allow Satan to afflict those who are without sin, Mather discussed several Biblical examples, including the frequently referenced story of Job whose "holy body . . . was sorely handled by Satan."¹³⁴

Finally, Mather returned to the story of Ann Cole and argued that her story proved that “a true Christian” can “be for a time under Satan’s power.”¹³⁵

But the elder Mather was not the only rhetor to rely on the messages communicated in the story of Job. Indeed, Cotton Mather also referenced this Biblical narrative at several points in his *Memorable Providences*. This tale is recorded in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, and begins with a description of Job as “blameless and upright,” and a man “who feared God and shunned evil.”¹³⁶ God told Satan that there was “no one on earth like” Job, but the Devil replied that Job was only faithful to God because he had “put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has . . . [and] blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land.”¹³⁷ Satan did not believe that Job was truly faithful to God, so the Lord allowed him to take anything and everything, other than life itself, away from Job.

Over the course of the next forty-two chapters, readers of the book of Job hear about how the Devil systematically destroyed everything Job had, from his possessions, to his family, and even his health. As these problems continued to plague him, Job’s wife encouraged him to “curse God and die,” but he replied by asking, “shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”¹³⁸ His friends assumed that Job was facing all of this trouble because he had committed some sin, and they also eventually encouraged him to turn from God. But Job’s response never wavered from the declaration that he made after Satan first began troubling him: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”¹³⁹ Thus, the final chapter of the book of Job records that “the Lord made him prosperous

again and gave him twice as much as he had before.”¹⁴⁰ It is interesting to note how similar the Puritan ministers’ answer to the dilemma of why Christian people could be troubled by witchcraft is to the twenty-first century minister’s answer to the question of why Christian people are beset by tragedy, because in both cases, Christians are encouraged *not* to question God and instead merely trust in his wisdom.

Cotton Mather relied on this story to support his argument that although people might face trouble from Satan, God would ultimately protect those who remained loyal to him. Indeed, Mather argued that

the holy angels are the friends, the guardians, the companions, of all holy men; they may open their eyes, and see more with them than against them. A camp, and host of angels will fight against all the harpies of hell which may offer to devour a saint of God. Use these things as the shields of the Lord; so you shall be preserved in Christ Jesus from the assaults of the destroyer.¹⁴¹

Thus, Mather insisted that if the Puritans trusted that God did indeed have a plan for their lives and did not turn from him, even if they were beset by witchcraft, they would ultimately be rewarded for their devotion in the same manner as Job.

Samuel Parris approached this topic from a slightly different perspective by centering his “Christ Knows How Many Devils There Are,” around John 6:70, which he recorded in his notes as, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil.”¹⁴² In this verse, Jesus was foreshadowing the discovery of Judas Iscariot, one of his twelve closest followers (or apostles) who would betray him and assure that he was executed. Thus, the basic premise of Parris’ sermon was that God had knowledge that surpassed human understanding. He broke down the lessons, or “doctrines” he wanted his congregants to learn from this verse into three separate arguments:

1. There are devils as well as saints in Christ's church.
2. Christ knows how many of these devils there are.
3. Christ knows who these devils are.¹⁴³

Parris used this sermon to impress upon his audience that God was omniscient and, just as he had in selecting Judas to become an apostle, God had a greater plan for humanity that while the Puritans might not understand or recognize, they still needed to trust and accept.

How to Deal with Spectres. Increase Mather spent more time than the other two ministers discussing the existence of apparitions and specters under the first theme about the importance of belief in witchcraft, so it is not surprising that he was the only individual to talk about how people should deal with these beings if they found themselves in one's presence. Mather emphasized that his readers should "be exceeding wary what credit they give unto, or how they entertain communication with such spectres."¹⁴⁴ Additionally, he cautioned against seeking out such apparitions. As proof, he offered the example of Peter Cotton, "who having a great desire to be satisfied about some questions which no man living could resolve him in; he applied himself to a maid who was possessed with a devil, charging the spirit in her to resolve his proposals."¹⁴⁵ As a result of this curiosity, "the man was by an invisible hand plucked up by his thumb, and twirled round, and thrown down upon the floor, and so continued in most grievous misery."¹⁴⁶ Finally, Mather reminded his readers that it was not wise to seek out spectral apparitions because they often came as "messengers of death," "harbingers of public mutations, wars, and calamitous times," and that "the plague or strange diseases follow after such appearances."¹⁴⁷ Ultimately, he urged a great deal of caution in any and all dealings with spectres and apparitions because they were both very real and often very evil.

Throughout this discussion, Increase Mather provided his readers with strategies for distinguishing a good spectre from an evil one and/or an apparition from the living person it was impersonating. In one case, he wrote that Dr. Dee and Kellet realized that the spirits who appeared to them were evil because they advised “them to break the seventh commandment of the moral law.”¹⁴⁸ And, as Mather argued, angels and good spirits would never instruct someone to break God’s commandments. In another story, a Mr. Earl was advised to touch the spectre because Luke 24:39 revealed that spirits did not have bodies.¹⁴⁹ Mr. Earl “went to take hold” of the apparition’s arm “but could feel no substance, only a vanishing shadow.”¹⁵⁰

Finally, Mather supplied his readers with a specific plan for making evil spirits disappear once they have been identified – calling out to God. To prove the effectiveness of this methodology, he included two examples of individuals who were able to make evil apparitions disappear. In the first narrative, the Turkish Chaous was faced with a spectre who instructed him not to be baptized, and when he “heard this discourse, being much perplexed in his spirit, he lifted up his hands and eyes to heaven, uttering words to this effect . . . when he had so spoken, looking down, he saw no body.”¹⁵¹ Secondly, Mather wrote that when Luther was faced with a vision in the form of Christ, he called out “away thou confounded Devil, I will have no Christ but what is in my Bible, whereupon the apparition vanished.”¹⁵²

Turn Away From Folk Magic. Out of all of the topics detailed in the second theme, this was probably the most pressing concern of the three ministers whose witchcraft discourse I am examining here. Increase Mather directly addressed the question of whether

or not Christians should divide magical practices into the categories of “white” and “black” that had been created by some societies in the past. Baroja wrote in his *The World of the Witches* that “white” magic referred to that which was “useful to society [and] . . . done in the open and in the broad daylight;” while “black” magic referred to that which was “anti-social . . . evil and secret, done under the cover of night.”¹⁵³ But Increase Mather was quick to argue that God did not recognize such distinctions. To support this claim, he quoted the influential sixteenth century Puritan theologian William Perkins who once declared that, “the good witch is a more horrible and detestable monster than the bad one.”¹⁵⁴

Based on the topics they covered in their rhetorical artifacts, the Puritan ministers clearly believed that illustrating the success of prayer and worship was not enough to convince their readers that this was the best course of action to take when dealing with episodes of witchcraft. Instead, they felt that it was vital to specifically discuss why their Puritan audience members needed to avoid using the popular folk magic practices of the time that had been purported to resolve many witchcraft-related problems. Between their two texts on witchcraft, Increase and his son Cotton specifically addressed four common forms of folk, or “white,” magic that were popular among Puritans in New England during this period: using herbs or plants for protection, using words or spells to drive away witches, relying on charms to discover secrets, and bottling urine or blood to create a protective charm.

The first question that Increase Mather took up in his *Illustrious Providences* was “whither it is lawful to make use of any sort of herbs or plants to preserve from witchcrafts, or from the power of evil spirits?”¹⁵⁵ He replied that utilizing such natural remedies was

unacceptable for three reasons. First, Mather argued that potions of any kind were tools of the Devil, and “for men to submit to any of the Devil’s sacraments is implicitly to make a covenant with him.”¹⁵⁶ Secondly, he wrote that using these techniques would not be successful because demons did not possess physical bodies, and as such “it is not possible that herbs or any sensible objects should have a natural influence upon them.”¹⁵⁷ Finally, he reminded his readers that “God in his holy word has forbidden his people to imitate the heathen nations . . . [and] to attempt the driving away of evil spirits by the use of herbs, fumes, etc. is an heathenish custom.”¹⁵⁸ Therefore, Increase contended that the folk practice of using natural materials such as plants and herbs to drive away demons and cure the symptoms of the possessed was useless, sinful, and constituted an act of witchcraft.

Next, Mather addressed the question of whether or not it was acceptable to use “characters, words, or spells, to charm any witches, devils or diseases.”¹⁵⁹ Again, he responded in the negative and supplied three reasons to support his claim. First, he argued that individuals who chose to use any type of spell committed the same sin as witches because they were choosing to “fence themselves with the devils’ shield against the devils’ sword.”¹⁶⁰ Secondly, Mather appealed to the common sense of his readers by writing that “there cannot be a greater vanity than to imagine that devils are really frightened with words and syllables.”¹⁶¹ Finally, he offered his readers several narratives as examples of times when individuals attempted to use spells to fight the Devil without knowing “that therein they gratify the Devil.”¹⁶² Thus, Mather concluded that attempting to use words to fight Satan was a mistake because the Devil was pleased when Christians used his tools, and it was vain to assume that such words could possibly frighten Satan or his agents.

Cotton Mather took on the third type of folk magic in his *Memorable Providences*. He focused specifically on using “wicked charms, for the finding of secrets.”¹⁶³ Although this practice also dealt with using Satan’s words for human ends, Cotton did not discuss the sinful nature of employing words to protect individuals from witchcraft or drive Satan’s confederates away. Instead, his concern here was about people who were trying to use words and spells to discover secrets God had hidden from them, or to learn about what was going to happen in their future. Mather instructed his readers that “secret things belong to God,” and that Christians should “shun these execrable things, lest [they] be left unto the furthest witchcraft committed by the abhorred of the Lord.”¹⁶⁴

Finally, both Increase and Cotton Mather discussed folk magic practices that required individuals to obtain bodily fluids from either a suspected witch or an afflicted individual and use them to create some sort of object or talisman that would protect people from the problems caused by witchcraft. In *Illustrious Providences*, Increase took up the question of “whether it be lawful for bewitched persons to draw blood from those whom they suspect for witches, or to put urine into a bottle, or to nail a horse-shoe at their doors, or the like, in hopes of recovering health thereby?”¹⁶⁵ Cotton took up a similar strategy in his *Memorable Providences*, termed “the urinary experiment,” which was the practice of taking urine and bottling it “with nails and pins.”¹⁶⁶ It was essential that these men dealt with the problematic nature of this type of behavior because these folk practices, and others of a similar nature, were some of the most common defensive actions taken by frightened American colonials during the early modern period.

Increase Mather clearly understood the importance of condemning these practices, and accordingly spent a significant amount of time in his *Illustrious Providences* discussing three specific reasons why they were unacceptable. First, he extended his earlier argument that using this type of folk magic was the same as using the Devil's tools, and that if a possessed individual gained relief from one of these practices, they "[could not] say, The Lord was my healer, but the Devil was my healer."¹⁶⁷ Then, Mather reminded his readers that although they might use folk magic to fight against the Devil, they would still "honour and worship the Devil by hoping in his salvation."¹⁶⁸ Finally, he argued that the use of folk magic placed innocent lives and souls in danger because Satan would gladly "heal one body upon condition that he may entangle many souls with superstition."¹⁶⁹

Cotton Mather's response to these types of folk magic practices in *Memorable Providences* was similar to, but less detailed than that of his father. He gave his readers one primary reason why using magic of any kind should be avoided; that using these forms of superstitious practices was essentially turning to Satan for aid. His instructions were specifically that

to use a charm against a charm, or to use a devil's shield against a devil's sword, who can with a good conscience try? All communion with hell is dangerous; all relief and succor coming by means whose whole force is founded in the laws of the kingdom of darkness, will be ready to leave a sting on the conscience of him that obtains it so.¹⁷⁰

Finally, at the end of his text, Mather left his readers with one final instruction about how to avoid wicked acts, such as the folk magic practices he had explicitly warned them against adopting. He encouraged that when any of them were "urged unto any ill act, let us refuse

it so: ‘No, this is like witchcraft, shall I by such wickedness make my self as a witch before the Lord?’”¹⁷¹

In his *Illustrious Providences*, Increase Mather provided a clear summary of the problems created by relying on any type of folk magic. He acknowledged that although folk magic could be, and indeed had been proven to be a successful way of curing diseases and driving away evil spirits, engaging in such actions placed an individual’s soul (and the souls of those living in his or her community) in great danger. Additionally, Mather blamed “superstitious and magical ways of trying witches” for causing some innocent individuals to be convicted and/or executed for witchcraft.¹⁷² He specifically mentioned trial by hot and cold water, by pricking, by sticking awls under their seats, and tests of being able or unable to repeat the Lord’s Prayer as questionable practices that had caused harm and sent innocent people to their death. Thus, the verdict of both Increase and Cotton Mather was that folk magic, although often intended to drive away Satan, actually encouraged Christians to turn to the Devil for help, when they should instead be relying on the guidance and help that came from God.

Have Faith. With the threat of folk magic firmly established, Cotton Mather and Samuel Parris turned their attention to instructing their congregants what actions *should* be taken to help them deal with the threat of witchcraft. They argued that because God was truly in control of all preternatural events, even those in which Satan might appear to be in control, the only response Puritans should have to episodes of possession was to have faith in God’s power and his plan for their lives.

In his *Memorable Providences*, Cotton Mather turned to scripture to support his claim about the importance and power of faith.¹⁷³

Tis recorded in Hebrews 11:33 some by faith stopped the mouths of lions. Tho thou shouldst be in a denful of them, yet faith, true faith would muzzle them all. By faith repair to Christ, who is the true Sampson, which meets and slays the lions that roar upon our souls. By faith repair to the Rock, even to the Rock that is higher than I! Where you may sit and shout and laugh at all the lions that roar in the wilderness, and say: Where I am, there you cannot come.¹⁷⁴

In his, “War with the Lamb,” Samuel Parris also relied on the authority of the Bible to provide credibility for his argument that Christians should have faith in God’s wisdom and promises during times of suffering.¹⁷⁵ Parris writes that such faith

may be of encouragement to all Christians, in the words of the apostle, to endure hardness as good soldiers of Christ (2 Timothy 2:3). For encouragement hereto, devils and [their] instruments shall not war against us always (Revelation. 2:10): “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried: and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.”¹⁷⁶

Although this was a very theoretical aspect of the Puritan argument concerning witchcraft, the ministers realized that this was also an important foundational concept for their readers and listeners to understand before they could move on to developing the final aspect of their second theme – providing individuals with actions that *could* be taken to fight against the problems that Satan and his confederates were creating for the inhabitants of New England.

Translate Faith Into Action. This final component was that Christian individuals must not have an empty faith in God, but that instead, they must translate that faith into faithful actions such as prayer, worship, scripture reading, the singing of hymns, Christian

charity, and living a virtuous life. Indeed, Cotton Mather argued that Satan wanted individuals to remain silent when they were afflicted, and it was for that exact reason that Christians should do something about their troubles. He instructed them to, “Let not him [the Devil] tie your tongues, and it is likely he will not gain your souls. Complain to a good God of the dangers in which you find yourselves; cry to Him: Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me.”¹⁷⁷ All three ministers suggested specific actions that Puritans could take ranging from participating in actions typically associated with worship services to everyday behaviors that could prevent Satan from gaining a foothold within their minds and souls.

As with so many other aspects of his arguments in *Illustrious Providences*, Increase Mather reinforced his instructions through narrative accounts. He recorded that toward the end of her torment, Elizabeth Knap accused one of her Christian neighbors of being the “cause of her affliction.”¹⁷⁸ Although Knap had indicted her of such a great sin, this neighbor “prayed earnestly with and for the possessed creature; after which [Elizabeth] confessed that Satan had deluded her; making her believe evil of her good neighbour without any cause. Nor did she after that complain of any apparition or disturbance from such a one.”¹⁷⁹ Similarly, after Satan had sung aloud to William Morse and his family, they were terrified and “called upon God; issue of which was, that suddenly with a mournful note, there were six times over uttered such expressions as: ‘Alas! Alas! Me knock no more! Me knock no more!’ And now all ceased.”¹⁸⁰ Finally, in his discussion of a family whose house was seriously troubled by evil spirits, Increase Mather wrote that the afflicted individuals eventually turned to God and spent time “in prayer, reading some portions of scripture, and singing of Psalms” and that “in time of prayer, “all was quiet” in the house.¹⁸¹

Cotton agreed with his father's assessment that prayer was one of the best possible courses of action to take when Christian individuals found themselves troubled or afflicted by witchcraft. But rather than simply writing this argument himself, Mather used the words of two different credible sources to back up his claims about the power of prayer. First, the esteemed ministers who wrote the preface to *Memorable Providences* argued that "prayer is a powerful and effectual remedy against the malicious practices of devils and those in covenant with them."¹⁸² Additionally, after Mather's extensive account of what had happened to the Goodwin children, he reprinted a shorter version of the same events that had been written by their father, John Goodwin. Thus, by using the testimony of a Godly individual who had personally faced the terror of witchcraft in his own home, Mather was able to provide his readers with an example of a time when prayer was successful in driving Satan away from a Christian family. Goodwin assured Mather's audience that

the promises of God are sweet; God having promised, to hear the prayer of the destitute . . . and he will not fail the expectation of those that wait on him; but he heareth the cry of the poor and the needy. . . . Now we see and know it is not a vain thing to call on the name of the Lord for he is a present help in the time of trouble; and we may boldly say the Lord has been our helper. I had sunk, but Jesus put forth his hand & bore me up.¹⁸³

At several points throughout the text, Mather affirmed what all of these men had written by reminding his readers that God was faithful and would listen to those who had faith in him and put that faith into action through prayer.

Samuel Parris concluded his "Christ Knows How Many Devils There Are" with instructions for how the individuals in his congregation should respond to the threat of witchcraft that seemed to be continually growing in their community. In this passage,

Parris, like both of the Mathers, called upon his parishioners to rely on prayer to help the community of Salem Village persevere through the troubling times they were facing. He argued that each individual should

be much in prayer that God would deliver our churches from devils; that God would not suffer devils in the guise of saints to associate with us. One sinner destroys much good: how much more one devil. Pray we also that not one true saint may suffer as a devil, either in name or body.¹⁸⁴

Although prayer and worship were the most commonly discussed actions that the Puritan ministers advised their listeners and readers to take to avoid and/or resolve instances of witchcraft, Cotton Mather offered his audience four additional ways in which they could put their Christian beliefs into actions that could “keep [them] from the roaring lion.”¹⁸⁵ First, he suggested that individuals should “beware is discontent,” or more specifically, “be not angry at any poverty, be not angry at any calumny, be not angry at any affliction whatsoever. [Because] discontent opens the doors of the soul for all the devils of hell to enter in.”¹⁸⁶ Next, Mather wrote that Puritans should “beware of idleness,” because as he argued, “the idle soul is an empty house . . . [and] when the Devil finds an idle person, he as it were, calls to more of his crew: ‘Come here! Come here! A brave prize for us all!’ . . . Of idleness comes no goodness.”¹⁸⁷ Third, he urged his readers to “beware of bad company,” for that is “the greatest engine the Devil has, to trepan the children of men withal. [As] an evil companion is a gin for a soul.”¹⁸⁸ Finally, Cotton argued that “there may be some old and great sin unrepented of” that is actually the cause of an individual’s present trouble with witchcraft.¹⁸⁹ He argued that in such cases, “confession with repentance affords a present remedy.”¹⁹⁰

Increase Mather offered a fitting conclusion to the development of this second theme toward the end of the portion of *Illustrious Providences* that he dedicated to witchcraft. Mather argued that after everything he had written about God's power and the evils of folk magic, his readers were left with no acceptable methods for combating the forces of Satan other than turning to God and trusting in his wisdom and power. Indeed, he wrote that "it is better for persons to repent of sin procuring cause of all affliction, and by the prayer of faith to betake themselves to this Lord Jesus, the great physician both of body and soul, and so to wait for healing in the use of lawful means."¹⁹¹ This passage emphasizes the issues at the core of this second theme of the Puritan argument about witchcraft – the value and importance of patience and faith. As a final warning against attempting to cure the sick or the possessed with any power other than that which was obtained through faith in God, Increase Mather wrote that those who attempted to use folk magic to fight the Devil "usually come to unhappy ends at last."¹⁹²

A Final Thought: The Impact of Puritan Constitutive Rhetoric

In a sense, the myth contains all other stages of the process: it gives specific meaning to a society's ideological commitments; it is the inventional source for arguments of ratification among those seduced by it; and it is the central target for those who will not participate in the collective life either because they are hostile to the myth itself or because they have tired of the myth and are not inclined to defend it.

Michael C. McGee, "In Search of 'The People'"¹⁹³

Although McGee made this statement in reference to political myths, I argue that his conclusion about the power of constitutive rhetoric holds true in all areas of societal life.

Indeed, McGee's argument might be even more persuasive in a religious context, where all of the "truths" that leaders speak of are really only true when their members supply them with authority through belief and faith. In his *Demon Lovers*, Stephens argues that rhetoric must hold a place of central importance within any analysis of witchcraft persecutions because historical treatises, essays, and books about witchcraft, such as *Illustrious Providences*, *Memorable Providences*, "Christ Knows How Many Devils There Are," and "These Shall Make War with the Lamb," sought to convince their readers that both God and the Devil were very *real* and *powerful* beings who played an *active* role in earthly matters. With this claim in mind, Stephens argues that Christian leaders wrote extensively about witchcraft theory because "skepticism was infectious; many later authors fought it because they had internalized it, and it riddles their texts with clashing logic and rhetoric. Witchcraft theory was an impassioned protest that 'these things cannot be imaginary!'"¹⁹⁴

Whether Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and Samuel Parris were writing to convince themselves or the individuals in their audiences that witchcraft was real, the two primary themes developed throughout these four texts were intended to be read as a specific "modes of action" for members of Puritan congregations and communities throughout New England. In rhetorically constructing how Puritans should respond to the threat of witchcraft, these three ministers essentially suggested that the correct action was to refrain from taking any physical action at all apart from acts of faith. Therefore, in arguing that Puritans should "just believe" that witchcraft was real, they increased the level of fear and suspicion throughout Puritan New England, and in contending that their readers and listeners should "just trust" that God was in control, these religious leaders would have had

their audiences accept that if anyone (even a friend or family member) was possessed by one of Satan's confederates, they should remember that God holds a larger plan they might be unaware of and accordingly respond through faith and worship rather than taking matters into their own hands.

Although the Mathers and Samuel Parris clearly believed that these "modes of action" constituted an effective and holy response to the work of the Devil, communities (such as Salem Village) who adopted these beliefs about witchcraft were left with few ways to cope with the overwhelming fear that accompanied any outbreak of witchcraft related activity in the seventeenth century. As this fear grew and individuals began to feel that their prayers were not being answered, religious and political leaders started to search for an earthly source of authority that could help them fight against the work of witches and wizards, and consequently regain control over their lives without placing their souls in jeopardy.

In this way, the rhetorical artifacts examined in this chapter effectively drove Salem Village to take action in the only arena that remained viable within the communal identity constructed through the rhetoric of their religious leadership: the judicial system. By taking legal action against those whom they suspected of witchcraft, the citizens of Puritan communities could literally rid their towns and villages of Satan's confederates without committing the sin of using folk magic. Thus, in adopting the dominant Puritan perspective on witchcraft, the residents of Salem Village placed their physical and spiritual welfare in the hands of an administrative body that was ill equipped to pass judgment on

such matters and, in turn, fueled the frenzied search for witches and wizards that would grip this small farming community throughout 1692 and 1693.

Notes

1. Cotton Mather, "A Discourse on the Power and Malice of the Devils," in *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* (Boston, MA: R.P., 1689), 1.
2. Alice Morse Earle, *The Sabbath in Puritan New England* (Williamstown, MA: Corner House Publishers, 1974), 259.
3. Michael C. McGee, "In Search of 'The People': A Rhetorical Alternative," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 61 (October 1975): 235.
4. Ashli Quesinberry Stokes, "Metabolife's Meaning: A Call for the Constitutive Study of Public Relations," *Public Relations Review* 31 (2005): 558.
5. Jolanta A. Drzewiecka, "Reinventing and Contesting Identities in Constitutive Discourses: Between Diaspora and Its Others," *Communication Quarterly* 50 (Winter 2002): 11-12.
6. Jon Radwan, "Music and Mediated Religious Identity: 'Jesus Freak'," *Journal of Media and Religion* 5 (2006): 2.
7. Stokes, "Metabolife's Meaning: A Call for the Constitutive Study of Public Relations," 558.
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and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

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123. Ibid., 169.

124. Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*, 205.

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130. Mather, *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences*, 188.

131. Ibid.

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136. Job 1:1 (New International Version).

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138. Job 2:9-10 (New International Version).

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141. Mather, "A Discourse on Witchcraft," 21.

142. Samuel Parris, "Christ Knows How Many Devils There Are" (sermon, Salem Village, MA, March 27, 1691/2).

143. Ibid.

144. Mather, *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences*, 219.

145. Ibid., 227.

146. Ibid., 229.

147. Ibid., 245.

148. Ibid., 209.

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151. Ibid., 217-18.

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158. Ibid., 252.

159. Ibid., 254.

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161. Ibid.

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163. Mather, “A Discourse on Witchcraft,” 27.

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168. Ibid., 267.

169. Ibid., 270.

170. Mather, *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions*, 60.

171. Mather, “A Discourse on Witchcraft,” 35.

172. Mather, *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences*, 179.

173. Hebrews 11:32-34 (New International Version): “And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Japhthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the

mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; who weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.”

174. Mather, “A Discourse on the Power and Malice of the Devils,” 17.

175. 2 Timothy 2:3 (New International Version): “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

176. Parris, “These Shall Make War With the Lamb.”

177. Mather, “A Discourse on the Power and Malice of the Devils,” 19.

178. Mather, *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences*, 141.

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183. John Goodwin, “Mantissa,” in *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions*, by Cotton Mather (Boston, MA: R.P., 1689), 51-52.

184. Parris, “Christ Knows How Many Devils There Are.”

185. Mather, “A Discourse on the Power and Malice of the Devils,” 14.

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194. Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*, 31.

CHAPTER III

INTERLUDE:

A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE SALEM WITCHCRAFT CRISIS

Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.

Exodus 22:18¹

The crimes of witches, then, exceed the sins of all others.

*The Malleus Maleficarium*²

Perhaps one way of understanding the Salem trials of 1692 was that they were an attempt to draw a line in the sand: the New England Congregational standing order and the colonial governments had found themselves tolerating Baptists, Anglicans, and even Quakers, but it drew the line at witchcraft.

David A. Weir, *Early New England: A Covenanted Society*³

Dozens of volumes, both works of fiction and non-fiction, have been devoted to telling the story of the Salem witchcraft crisis.⁴ This section is not intended to replicate these works, or to serve as a detailed record of all of the events that unfolded during 1692 and 1693 in Essex County, Massachusetts. Rather, I have included this brief interlude to fill the chronological gap between the texts examined in Chapter II and those discussed in Chapter III and provide the reader with some historical information about the trials themselves. This section is organized chronologically, beginning in January 1692, when the first accusations were made, and ending in 1693 when the trials drew to a close. For each

of the epigraphs in this interlude, I selected excerpts from primary sources that provide a first-hand look into how the crisis unfolded over three hundred years ago.

January/February 1692

Whereas Mrs. Joseph Hutcheson, Thomas Putnam, Edward Putnam, and Thomas Preston Yeomen of Salem Village, in the County of Essex personally appeared before us, and made complaint on behalf of their majesties against Sarah Osborne the wife of Alexa' Osborne of Salem Village aforesaid, and Tituba an Indian woman servant, of Mr. Samuel Parris of said place also; for suspicion of witchcraft, by them committed and thereby much injury done to Elizabeth Parris, Abigail Williams, Anna Putnam, and Elizabeth Hubert all of Salem Village aforesaid sundry times with in this two months and lately also done, at said Salem Village contrary to the peace and laws of our Sovereign Lord & Lady William & Mary of England, King & Queen.

You are therefore in their Majesties; names hereby required to apprehend and forthwith or as soon as may be bring before us the above said Sarah Osborne, and Tituba Indian, at the house of Lt. Nathaniel Ingersoll in said place. And if it may be by tomorrow about ten of the clock in the morning then and there to be examined relating to the above said premises.

Warrant for Tituba and Sarah Osborne⁵

- Reverend Samuel Parris' daughter Betty (age 9) and his niece Abigail Williams (age 11) begin to act strangely. Their symptoms are similar to those that the Goodwin children had dealt with only a few years earlier. Soon, other children in Salem Village begin to suffer from the same ailments and torments.
- Parris calls for a physician, Dr. Griggs, to come examine Betty and Abigail. After failing to find a medical cure for their condition, the doctor concludes that the girls are bewitched.
- Parris leads his congregation in prayer services and fasting in an attempt to discover the source of evil in his community.
- John Indian and/or his wife Tituba, Parris' Barbadian slaves, is/are caught baking a witch cake – a folk magic practice intended to expose the identity of the witches who are tormenting Betty and Abigail.

- The girls name Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tituba as the witches who are afflicting them, and warrants are sent out to bring the three women to be questioned by Hathorne.

March 1692

Give glory to God & confess then.

MARTHA COREY: But I cannot confess.

Do not you see how these afflicted do charge you?

COREY: We must not believe distracted persons.

Why do you improve to hurt them?

COREY: I improved none.

The Examination of Martha Corey⁶

They had several sore fits, in the time of public worship, which did something interrupt me in my first prayer; being so unusual. After Psalm was sung, Abigail Williams said to me, "Now stand up, and name your text!" . . .

In sermon time when Goodwife Cory was present in the meetinghouse Abigail Williams called out, "Look where Goodwife Cory sits on the beam suckling her 4 yellow bird betwixt her fingers!" Anne Putman another girl afflicted said there was a yellow-bird sat on my hat as it hung on the pin in the pulpit! But those that were by, restrained her from asking about it.

Deodat Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative*⁷

- In court, Good and Osborne maintain their innocence, but Tituba confesses to practicing witchcraft.
- More individuals come forward to claim afflictions and make accusations. The type of individuals suspected of being witches expand beyond peripheral members of the community. Soon, otherwise highly respected members of the local Puritan congregation become targets of the witchcraft accusations.
- Deodat Lawson, one of Salem Village's former ministers, returns to witness the events unfolding in the community where he used to live and work. While he leads a Sunday

church service, Lawson is able to witness first-hand the strange actions of some of the afflicted girls.

- Dorcas Good, the four-year-old daughter of Sarah Good, is arrested on suspicion of witchcraft.
- By the end of the month, Martha Corey, Rebecca Nurse, and Elizabeth Proctor would all be accused of witchcraft and brought in for questioning.

April 1692

Why do you seem to act witchcraft before us, by the motion of your body, which seems to have influence upon the afflicted?

BRIDGET BISHOP: I know nothing of it, I am innocent to a witch. I know not what a Witch is.

How do you know then that you are not a witch?

BISHOP: I do not know what you say.

How can you know, you are no witch, & yet not know what a witch is?

BISHOP: I am clear: if I were any such person, you should know it.

The Examination of Bridget Bishop⁸

Went to Salem, where, in the Meeting-house, the persons accused of witchcraft were examined; was a very great assembly; 'twas awful to see how the afflicted persons were agitated.

The Diary of Samuel Sewall⁹

Goodwife Cory upon Mr. Parris's naming his text, John 6:70, "one of them is a devil," the said Goodwife Cory went immediately out of the meeting-house, and flung the door after her violently, to the amazement of the congregation: she was afterward seen by some in their fits.

Deodat Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative* ¹⁰

- Following their defense of their sister Rebecca Nurse, Sarah Cloyce and Mary Easty are both accused of practicing witchcraft.

- ≈ John Proctor becomes the first man identified as a witch.
- ≈ Mary Warren, one of the accusers and John Proctor's servant, briefly confesses that the "afflicted girls" are lying, but quickly reverses this statement and returns to her former role as an accuser.
- ≈ Witchcraft allegations extend to George Burroughs, one of Salem's former ministers who is now living in Maine.
- ≈ By the end of the month, Giles Cory, Bridget Bishop, Sarah Cloyce, Mary Easty, John Proctor, Abigail Hobbs, Nehemiah Abbott, William and Deliverance Hobbs, Edward and Sarah Bishop, Mary Black, Sarah Wildes, Mary English, and George Burroughs are all accused of witchcraft and examined by the court.
- ≈ Abigail Hobbs confesses and Nehemiah Abbott is found not guilty.

May 1692

The rest of the summer, was a very doleful time, unto the whole country. The devils, after a most praeternatural manner, by the dreadful judgment of heaven took a bodily possession of many people, in Salem, and the adjacent places; and the houses of the poor people, began to be filled with the horrid cries of persons tormented by evil spirits. There seemed an execrable witchcraft, in the foundation of this wonderful affliction, and many persons, of diverse characters, were accused, apprehended, prosecuted, upon the visions of the afflicted.

The Diary of Cotton Mather¹¹

[All the afflicted fell into most intolerable out-cries & agonies.]

MARTHA CARRIER: It is a shameful thing that you should mind these folks that are out of their wits.

Do you not see them?

CARRIER: If I do speak you will not believe me?

You do see them, said the accusers.

CARRIER: You lie, I am wronged.

The Examination of Martha Carrier¹²

- Increase Mather and the newly appointed Governor William Phips arrive from England with a new colonial charter.
- Sarah Osborne dies in jail.
- Mary Easty is released, but after significant protest by members of the community, she is re-arrested and returned to jail.
- George Burroughs is arrested in Maine and brought to Salem's jail.
- Governor Phips establishes a Court of Oyer and Terminer to oversee the growing number of witchcraft cases in Massachusetts, naming Deputy Governor William Stoughton as the Chief Justice and John Hathorne, Nathaniel Saltonstall, Bartholomew Gedney, Peter Sergeant, Samuel Sewall, and Wait Still Winthrop as justices.
- By the end of the month, George Jacobs, Sr., Margaret Jacobs, Sarah Morey, Lyndia Dustin, Susannah Martin, Dorcas Hoar, Sarah Churchill, George Burroughs, Martha Carrier, John Alden, Wilmott Redd, Elizabeth Howe, and Phillip English are all accused and examined by the court.

June 1692

Some time in April 1692 there appeared to me the apparition of an old short woman that told me her name was Martin and that she came from Amsbery who did immediately afflict me urging me to write in her book but on the 2nd of May, 1692 being the day of her examination Susana Martin did most grievously afflict me during the time of her examination for when she did but look personally upon she would strike me down or almost choke and several times since the apparition of Susannah Martin has most grievously afflicted me by pinching me . . .

Ann Putnam, Jr. v. Susannah Martin¹³

To the Honoured Court of Oyer and Terminer now sitting in Salem

That whereas some women did search your petitioner at Salem, as I did then conceive for some supernatural mark, and then one of the said women which is known to be, the most ancient skillful prudent person of them all as to any such concerned: did express herself to be: of a contrary opinion from the rest and did then declare, that she saw nothing in or about your Honours' poor petitioner but what might arise from a natural cause . . . and therefore your petitioner humbly prays that your Honours would be pleased

to admit of some other women to enquire into this great: concern, those that are most grand wise and skillful . . . before I am brought to my trial: all which I hope your Honours: will take into your prudent consideration, and find it requisite so to do: for my life lies now in your hands under God: and being conscious of my own innocence -- I humbly beg that I may have liberty to manifest it to the world partly by the means above said.

Rebecca Nurse's Petition to the Court¹⁴

- The Court of Oyer and Terminer opens. By the end of the month, the court will condemn Bridget Bishop, Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Sarah Wildes, Sarah Good, and Elizabeth Howe to death.
- One of the justices, Nathaniel Saltonstall, resigns his position as justice because of his dissatisfaction with the court's proceedings. He is replaced by Jonathan Corwin.
- Bridget Bishop is the first convicted witch to be hung for her alleged crimes.
- Cotton Mather and other leading ministers draft "The Return of Several Ministers" and deliver it to Chief Justice Stoughton. The document urges the court to stop using spectral evidence to prove witchcraft accusations.

July 1692

How dare you come in here & bring the devil with you to afflict these poor creatures?

LACEY: I know nothing of it.

You are here accused for practicing witchcraft upon Goody Ballard. Which way do you do it?

LACEY: I cannot tell; where is my mother that made me a witch and I knew it not.

Can you look on Mary Warren & not hurt her? Look upon her now in a friendly way.

[Lacey tried so to do, and struck her down.]

Do you acknowledge now you are a witch?

LACEY: Yes

How long have you been a witch?

LACEY: Not above a week.

The Examination of Mary Lacey, Jr.¹⁵

Concerning my beloved wife Mary Bradbury this is that I have to say: we have been married fifty five years: and she hath been a loving & faithful wife to me, unto this day she hath been wonderful laborious diligent & industrious in her place and employment, about the bringing up our family (which have been eleven children of our own, & four grand-children: she was both prudent, & provident: of a cheerful spirit liberal charitable: she being now very aged & weak, & grieved under her affliction may not be able to speak much for herself, not being so free of speech as some others may be: I hope her life and conversation hath been such amongst her neighbours, as gives a better & more real testimony of her, then can be expressed by words.

Thomas Bradbury for Mary Bradbury¹⁶

☞ Rebecca Nurse, Susannah Martin, Elizabeth Howe, Sarah Good, and Sarah Wildes are all hung on Gallows Hill.

August 1692

From the Dungeon in Salem Prison, August 20, 1692

Honoured Father . . . The reason of my confinement is this, I having, through the magistrates' threatenings, and my own vile and wretched heart, confessed several things contrary to my conscience and knowledge, tho to the wounding of my own soul, the Lord pardon me for it; but oh the terrors of a wounded conscience who can bear. But blessed by the Lord, he would not let me go on in my sins, but in mercy I hope so my soul would not suffer me to keep it in any longer, but I was forced to confess the truth of all before the magistrates, who would not believe me, but tis their pleasure to put me in here, and God knows how soon I shall be put to death. Dear Father, let me beg your prayers to the Lord on my behalf, and send us a joyful and happy meeting in heaven. . . .

So leaving you to the protection of the Lord, I rest your Dutiful Daughter [Margaret Jacobs].

Margaret Jacob's Letter to Her Father, George Jacobs, Jr.¹⁷

This day [*in the margin*, Doleful! Witchcraft] George Burroughs, John Willard, John Proctor, Martha Carrier, and George Jacobs were executed at Salem, a very great number of Spectators being present. Mr. Cotton Mather was there, Mr. Sims, Hale, Noyes, Chiever, &c. All of them said they were innocent, Carrier and all. Mr. Mather says they all died by a Righteous Sentence. Mr. Burroughs by his speech, prayer, protestation of his innocence, did much move unthinking persons, which occasions their speaking hardly concerning his being executed.

The Diary of Samuel Sewall¹⁸

- The Court of Oyer and Terminer finds George Jacobs, Sr., Martha Carrier, George Burroughs, John and Elizabeth Proctor, and John Willard guilty of practicing witchcraft and sentences them to death.
- During the proceedings, Margaret Jacobs testifies against her grandfather, George Jacobs, Sr., but before the month is over, she retracts her testimony.
- George Jacobs, Sr., Martha Carrier, George Burroughs, John Proctor, and John Willard are all hung as witches.
- Although the court has found her guilty, Elizabeth Proctor is not executed because she is pregnant.

September 1692

More weight.

Giles Corey's Final Words¹⁹

The petition of the subscribers humbly sheweth that it hath pleased the Lord we hope in mercy to the soul of Dorcas Hoar of Beverly to open her [heart] out of distress of conscience, as she professeth, to confess her self guilty of the heinous crime of witchcraft for which she is condemned, & how & when she was taken in the snare of the Devil, & that she signed his book with the forefinger of her right hand &c. . . .

And being in great distress of conscience earnestly craves a little longer time of life to realize & perfect her repentance for the salvation of her soul.

These are therefore humbly to petition in her behalf that their may be granted her one months time or more to prepare for death & eternity.

Petition of John Hale, Nicholas Noyes, Daniel Epes, and
John Emerson, Jr. for Dorcas Hoar²⁰

I petition to your Honours not for my own life for I know I must die and my appointed time is set but the Lord he knows it is that if it be possible no more innocent blood may be shed which undoubtedly cannot be avoided in the way and course you go in I question not but your Honours does to the utmost of your powers in the discovery and detecting of witchcraft and witches and would not be guilty of innocent blood for the world but by my own innocence I know you are in the wrong way the Lord in his infinite mercy direct you in this great work if it be his blessed will that no more Innocent blood be shed.

Petition of Mary Easty²¹

- ✧ The Court of Oyer and Terminer finds Martha Corey, Mary Easty, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Dorcas Hoar, Mary Bradbury, Margaret Scott, Wilmott Redd, Samuel Wardwell, Mary Perker, Abigail Faulkner, Rebecca Eames, Mary Lacy, Ann Foster, and Abigail Hobbs guilty of witchcraft and condemn them to death.
- ✧ Giles Cory refuses to enter a plea in court and dies after two days of enduring *peine forte et dure* (a form of torture often referred to as “pressing”).
- ✧ Dorcas Hoar becomes the first convicted witch to renounce her innocence and make a full confession. This action delays her execution.
- ✧ Martha Cory, Mary Eastey, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeater, Margaret Scott, Wilmot Redd, Samuel Wardwell, and Mary Parker are hung.

October 1692

For from the information we have had and the discourse some of us have had with the prisoners, we have reason to think that the extreme urgency that was used with some of them by their friends and others who privately examined them, and the fear they were then under, hath been an inducement to them to own such things, as we cannot since find they are conscious of; and the truth of what we now declare, we judge will in time

more plainly appear. And some of them have expressed to their neighbours that it hath been their great trouble, that they have wronged themselves and the truth in their confessions. . . .

Our troubles which hitherto have been great, we foresee are like to continue and increase, if other methods be not taken then as yet have been, for there are more of our neighbours of good reputation & approved integrity, who are still accused, and complaints have been made against them, and we know not who can think himself safe, if the accusations of children and others who are under a diabolical influence shall be received against persons of good fame.

Petition of the Andover Ministers and Twenty-Two Others²²

I Arthur Abbott having a great impulse upon me to declare unto the Honored Court (as above said sitting in Salem) some things that I had formerly discoursed with Goodwife Procter of Salem about and seen in her house, and gave evidence thereof unto the said Honored Court . . . I do humbly acknowledge my weakness and real sorrow for . . . any way insisting upon that, but being extraordinarily charged with falsehood as to the things I had both seen and heard in her house . . . neither did I intend any of those great and solemn expressions at Major Appleton's, should any way be understood as to the time, but the things themselves, and this desired to leave to the world, not knowing how it might please God to deal with me.

Declaration of Arthur Abbott²³

- Thomas Brattle writes his famous letter criticizing the witchcraft trials.
- Increase Mather publically denounces the use of spectral evidence. He visits Salem jail, and discovers that many of those who have confessed desire to take back these confessions. He criticizes the trials in his book, *Cases of Conscience*.
- Governor Phips orders that spectral evidence should no longer be used as evidence.
- At the end of the month, Governor Phips finally dissolves the Court of Oyer and Terminer, and many of those still being held in jail are released.

November 1692

In October some of these accusers were sent for to Gloucester, and occasioned four women to be sent to prison; but Salem prison being so full it could receive no more, two were sent to Ipswich prison. In November they were sent for again by Lieutenant Stephens, who was told that a sister of his was bewitched; in their way passing over Ipswich-bridge, they met with an old woman, and instantly fell into their fits. But by this time, the validity of such accusations being much questioned, they found not that encouragement they had done elsewhere, and soon withdrew. . . .

And now nineteen persons having been hanged, and one pressed to death, and eight more condemned, in all twenty-eight, of which above a third part were members of some of the churches in New-England, and more than half of them of a good conversation in general, and not one cleared; about fifty having confessed themselves to be witches, of which not one executed; above an hundred and fifty in prison, and above two hundred more accused; the special commission of oyer and terminer comes to a period, which has no other foundation than the governor's commission.

Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World*²⁴

- The General Court of Massachusetts colony creates a Superior Court to try the remaining individuals who are still imprisoned on charges of witchcraft. This court will not accept spectral evidence in determining the innocent or guilt of the accused.
- Although a few new accusations are made in Essex County, public opinion no longer supports allegations of witchcraft, and the charges are soon dismissed.
- From this point on, no further convictions will be made.

December 1692

Be it enacted by the Governor Council and representatives in General Court assembled and by the authority of the same, that if any person or persons [after] shall use, practice or exercise any invocation or conjuration of any evil and wicked spirit, or shall consult, covenant with entertain, employ, feed or reward any evil and wicked spirit to or for any intent or purpose; or take up any dead man woman or child, out of his, her, or their grave, or any other place where the dead body resteth, or the skin, bone or any other part

of any dead person to be employed or used in any manner of witchcraft, sorcery, charm or enchantment, or shall use, practice or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment charm or sorcery, whereby any person shall be killed destroyed, wasted, consumed, pined or lamed in his or her body, or any part thereof, that then every such offender or offenders, their aiders, abettors, and counselors being of any the said offences duly and lawfully convicted and attained, shall suffer pains of death as a felon or felons. And further to the intent that all manner of practice, use or exercise of witchcraft enchantment, charm or sorcery, should be henceforth utterly avoided, abolished and taken away.

A Bill Against Conjuraton, Witchcraft and Dealing with
Evil and Wicked Spirits²⁵

The various awful judgments of God continued upon the English nation, and the dispersions thereof in their Majesties' several plantations, by war, sickness, earth-quakes, and other desolating calamities; more especially by permitting witchcrafts and evil angels to rage amongst this his people: all which loudly call to deep humiliation and earnest application to heaven as the best expedient for deliverance.

Upon consideration thereof, His Excellency and Council have thought fit, and do hereby appoint Thursday, the twenty ninth of December currant, to be kept as a day of solemn prayer with fasting in the several towns throughout the province.

Order By His Excellency and Council, December 20, 1692²⁶

- ☞ The General Court of Massachusetts passes several laws relaxing the repercussions for the victims of the witchcraft trials and their families. Women who were widowed as a result of the proceedings are not allowed to keep their inheritance, and executed individuals are now permitted to be buried on allow ground.
- ☞ Governor Phips calls for a day of prayer and fasting throughout the colony of Massachusetts.

1693

Had charity been put on, the Devil would not have had such an advantage against us, and I believe many innocent persons have been accused and imprisoned.

Letter of Reverend Francis Dane²⁷

Among many arguments to evince this, that which is most under present debate, is that which refers to something vulgarly called spectr[al] evidence, and a certain sort of ordeal or trial by the sight and touch. The principal plea to justify the convictive evidence in these, is fetched from the consideration of the wisdom and righteousness of God in governing the world, which they suppose would fail, if such things were permitted to befall an innocent person; but it is certain, that too resolute conclusions drawn from hence, are bold usurpations upon spotless sovereignty; and though, some things, if suffered to be common, would subvert this government, and disband, yea ruin humane society; yet God doth sometimes suffer such things to evence, that we may thereby know how much we are beholden to Him.

Letter by William Hubbard, Samuel Phillips, Charles Morton, James Allen, Michael Wigglesworth, Samuel Whiting, Sr., Samuel Willard, John Baily, Jabez Fox, Joseph Gerrish, Samuel Angier, John Wise, Joseph Capen, and Nehemiah Walter preceding Increase Mather's *Cases of Conscience*²⁸

- The Superior Court begins its work, presided over by Judge Stoughton, who refuses to give in to public pressure and continues to prosecute individuals who have been accused. He calls for the execution of the women whose sentences had been suspended because of their pregnancies. At the beginning of the year, he finds three additional people guilty of witchcraft.
- The remainder of the individuals who have been accused are released because all of the evidence against them is spectral.
- Instructions finally arrive in May ordering the trials to come to an end. Governor Phips issues an order for all of those who are in prison to be released, and for all of those who have been convicted to be pardoned.

- ☞ Individuals who had taken leadership roles in the trials begin to write letters and publish books explaining their actions in an attempt to defend themselves against widespread criticism.

Notes

1. Exodus 22:18 (New International Version).
2. Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Rev. Montague Summers (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1971), 77.
3. David A. Weir, *Early New England: A Covenanted Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 231.
4. For scholarly interpretations of the crisis, see the scholarly interlude later in this work. For works written for the general public, see: K. David Goss, *The Salem Witch Trials: A Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008); Dominic Alexander, *Spellbound: From Ancient Gods to Modern Merlins A Time Tour of Myth and Magic* (Pleasantville, NY: The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 2002); Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Devil's Disciples: Makers of the Salem Witchcraft Trials* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Frederick M. Stowell, "The Salem Witch Trials, 1692," in *Events that Changed America Through the Seventeenth Century*, eds. John E. Findling and Frank W. Thackeray (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 159-74. For representations specifically written for a younger audience, see: Stephen Krensky, *Witch Hunt: It Happened in Salem Village* (New York, NY: Random House, 1989); Karen Zeinert, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials* (New York, NY: Franklin Watts, 1989); Lori Lee Wilson, *How History is Invented: The Salem Witch Trials* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publication Company, 1997); Marc Aronson, *Witch-Hunt: Mysteries of the Salem Witch Trials* (New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2003); Thomas G. Aylesworth, *The Story of Witches* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1979).
5. "Warrant vs. Tituba and Sarah Osborne," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 3:745.
6. "Examination of Martha Corey," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 1:250.
7. Deodat Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative of Some Remarkable Passages Relating to Sundry Persons Afflicted by Witchcraft at Salem Village, Which Happened from the Nineteenth of March to the Fifth of April, 1692* (Boston, MA: Benjamin Harris, 1692).
8. "Examination of Bridget Bishop, First Version," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 1:84.
9. Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall*, ed. M. Halsey Thomas (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Grioux, 1973), 1:289.

10. Lawson, *A Brief and True Narrative of Some Remarkable Passages Relating to Sundry Persons Afflicted by Witchcraft at Salem Village*.

11. Cotton Mather, *The Diary of Cotton Mather* (New York, NY: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, n.d.), 1:150.

12. "Examination of Martha Carrier," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 1:185.

13. "Ann Putnam, Jr. v. Susannah Martin," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 2:576.

14. "Rebecca Nurse Petition to the Court," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 2:606-7.

15. "Examination of Mary Lacey, Jr., Mary Lacey, Sr., Ann Foster, Richard Carrier, and Andrew Carrier," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 2:520.

16. "Thomas Bradbury for Mary Bradbury," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 1:117-18.

17. "Margaret Jacobs to Her Father, George Jacobs, Jr.," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 2:490-91.

18. Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall*, 1:294.

19. These final words have been attributed to Corey by a variety of rhetors over the past three hundred years, most famously in Arthur Miller's "The Crucible." However, there is no historical proof that Corey actually uttered them immediately before his death. Although Corey's final moments are described in several places, including Samuel Sewall's diary, the earliest reference to the "more weight" line seems to be an anonymous poem, likely from the early eighteenth century, that is sometimes titled "Man of Iron." A copy of this poem can be found in Samuel Adams Drake, *A Book of New England Legends and Folk Lore in Prose and Poetry* (Boston, MA: Roberts Brothers, 1884), 195-96. But, regardless of whether or not these words are historically accurate, they are a fair representation of what historians know about Corey's response to the events surrounding his arrest and death.

20. "Petition of John Hale, Nicholas Noyes, Daniel Epes, and John Emerson, Jr.," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 2:403-4.

21. "Petition of Mary Easty," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 1:304.

22. "Petition of the Andover Ministers and Twenty-Two Others," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 3:877.

23. "Declaration of Arthur Abbott," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 2:665-66.

24. Robert Calef, *More Wonders of the Invisible World* (London, UK: 1700), 225.

25. "A Bill Against Conjuraton, Witchcraft and Dealing with Evil and Wicked Spirits," in Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., *The Salem Witchcraft Papers: Verbatim Transcripts of the Legal Documents of the Salem Witchcraft Outbreak of 1692* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1977), 3:885.

26. Massachusetts (Colony) Governor, Decree by His Excellency and Council . . . A Day of Prayer with Fasting, December 20, 1692.

27. Letter of Reverend Francis Dane, January 2, 1693, excerpt found in Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft: With an Account of Salem Village and A History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects* (Boston, MA: Wiggin and Lunt, 1867), 2:460.

28. Letter by William Hubbard, Samuel Phillips, Charles Morton, James Allen, Michael Wigglesworth, Samuel Whiting, Sr., Samuel Willard, John Baily, Jabez Fox, Joseph Gerrish, Samuel Angier, John Wise, Joseph Capen, and Nehemiah Walter, "To the Christian Reader," in *Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits* by Increase Mather (Boston, MA: Benjamin Harris, 1693): A4.

CHAPTER IV

APOLOGIA:

THE AFTERMATH OF THE SALEM WITCHCRAFT CRISIS

What will be the issue of these troubles, God only knows; I am afraid that ages will not wear off that reproach and those stains which these things will leave behind them upon our land. I pray God pity us, humble us, forgive us, and appear mercifully for us in this our mount of distress.

Letter of Thomas Brattle, F.R.S., October 8, 1692¹

As with so many other topics in the field of rhetoric, the study of apologetic discourse can be traced back to ancient Greece. Ryan writes that “the Greek noun *apologia* is defined broadly as ‘a speech in defense,’ and the Greek verb *apologeomai* includes a variety of defenses which were not limited to a defense of character: ‘speak in defense, defend oneself, speak in answer to, defend oneself against, defend what has been done.’”² In her examination of ancient Greek apologies, Downey notes that “classical apologies were managed similarly to the way all judicial proceedings were conducted. When accused of a misdeed, the apologist composed and delivered a speech of self-defense in the presence of her/his accuser(s) and the voting body of the General Assembly who, upon completion of the address, rendered a vote and, if guilty, a sentence immediately.”³

Thus, it is not surprising that Aristotle begins his section on forensic speeches in the *Rhetoric* by declaring that judicial discourse focuses on “accusation [*kategoria*] and defense [*apologia*].”⁴ From this ancient examination of the rhetorical strategies involved in a verbal

self-defense, scholars in the fields of communication, public relations, psychology, religious studies, and political science have constructed a vast theoretical framework of knowledge about the most effective ways for an individual and/or an organization to speak in defense of him/her/itself.

A Survey of the Field of Apologia

Self-defense in response to accusation is an ontological human trait, as relevant today as it was in the classical period. What distinguishes the past from the present is not the existence of threat followed by defense, but the manifestation of the response, the situational conditions accompanying it, and its emergent meaning. . . . Apologia is characterized by fixed and dynamic forms as well as continually evolving functions.

Sharon D. Downey, “The Evolution of the Rhetorical Genre of Apologia”⁵

As the historical interlude that preceded this chapter illustrated, as the number of accusations, trials, convictions, and executions in Essex County increased, the people of Salem Village and the colony of Massachusetts as a whole clearly realized that these proceedings had begun to spin out of control. And, by the time that Governor Phips disbanded the Court of Oyer and Terminer in October of 1692, it seemed that everyone – politicians, clergy, and colonials alike – had begun to formulate their own explanation for the remarkable events that had transpired over the previous eight months. But such a rationalization was surely not simple to manufacture. After all, scores of individuals (some of whom were even known for their exceptional character) had been tried for witchcraft, a four-year-old child had been accused of confederacy with the devil, and one suspected witch had endured three painful days of *peine-du-force* for refusing to enter a plea concerning a sin

that he insisted he did not commit. Indeed, even those who believed that trial and execution for the sin of witchcraft was warranted were beginning to realize that something had gone terribly wrong at Salem.

Thus, it is not surprising that the individuals who played key leadership roles in the Salem witchcraft crisis began to publicly voice their assessment of the crisis in June of 1692, nearly three months *before* the final round of executions were carried out in Salem Village. And, by virtue of human nature, each of these men reached his own unique conclusion about the cause of the crisis, the validity of the trial process, and who or what should be blamed for allowing these events to transpire. To establish a framework for my analysis of these responses, I will spend the first portion of this chapter reviewing the extensive scholarly work that has been conducted within the field of *apologia*. This review is divided into four sections: (1) a historical overview of the evolution of scholarship concerning apologetic discourse, (2) an introduction to the primary apologetic exigencies that are relevant to the present analysis, (3) a summary the rhetorical goals and strategies associated with *apologia*, and (4) a brief discussion of how to best pair exigencies, goals, and strategies to formulate an effective *apologia*.

EVOLVING SCHOLARSHIP ON THE RHETORIC OF DEFENSE

Corbett argues that “since the beginning of civilization, society has always been interested in listening to a publicly accused citizen defend himself or herself— especially if that citizen occupies a prominent or sensitive position in the polity.”⁶ Thus, it should come as no surprise that Aristotle outlined one of the earliest strategic frameworks for constructing a defensive speech in his discussion of judicial oratory in the *Rhetoric*.

Hermagoras developed these ideas more formally into what modern scholars still refer to as *stasis* theory. In their contemporary analysis of President Clinton's use of apologetic discourse, Kramer and Olson define stases as "choices of pivotal places from which an apologist might take a stand between accusers."⁷

Thus, when scholars search for the ancient roots of apologetic discourse, they cannot simply attribute this area of scholarship to the work of a single individual. Indeed, Thompson contends that "the legal issues, afterwards called *stasis*, appear in Aristotle in an 'embryo stage' and are 'never exactly defined, or employed as a well determined and recognized technical and legal classification.'"⁸ And, as Ryan reminds us, other ancient scholars also contributed to the early work on the rhetoric of accusation and defense, as "Plato divided oratory into accusation and apology . . . Isocrates observed the same motivational relationship . . . [and] Quintilian also appreciated the nature of accusation and defense."⁹ Therefore, although Hermagoras is often credited with formulating *stasis* theory, many scholars contend that he should not be hailed for developing these ideas, but instead for drafting "the first detailed and systematic treatment" of them.¹⁰

In his 1964 study of the classical work on stases, Nadeau argues that "the concept of stock issues today provides a parallel useful in understanding the ancient explication of stases."¹¹ Indeed, this framework provides apologists with four "stock" lines of argument to consider in developing a speech of defense. These *topoi* could also be understood through Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's definition of *loci* as "headings under which arguments can be classified," or "storehouses for arguments."¹² Because *stasis* theory will play a vital role in

organizing my analysis later in this chapter, I offer the following descriptions of these four lines of argument:

1. *Stochasmos* – Nadeau argues that “in the system of Hermogenes, the existence of a thing is doubtful (conjecture) or obvious.”¹³ Thus, the question here would be “whether an act took place.”¹⁴ Indeed, Kennedy writes that when Cicero took up this first issue, he used the Latin word *conjecturalis*, which is translated as “when the fact is at issue.”¹⁵ Thus, in his 2005 investigation of the use of *stasis* theory in apologetic discourse, Marsh writes that “this stasis would involve the question: *Did he [or she] do it?*”¹⁶
2. *Horos* – If the rhetor was not able to construct an adequate defense by arguing that he or she was not responsible for the crisis event, then the individual would proceed to this second topic, which the Greeks understood as “having to do with what a thing is through its essence or essential qualities;” or asking if a thing “is imperfect (undefined) or perfect (defined).”¹⁷ Cicero offered a more concise discussion of this *stasis* through using the term *definitiva* to mean “when the definition of the action is debated.”¹⁸ In contemporary scholarship, Marsh writes that if an individual was defending him/herself against murder charges, the *stasis* of definition would call for the question “*was this murder unjust*” to be asked.¹⁹
3. *Poiotes* – In the event that the rhetor could not use the issue of definition to defend his or her actions, the individual would then proceed to this third *stasis*, known to the Greeks as the “quality of nonessential kinds as distinguished from essential qualities noted in a definition,”²⁰ and to Cicero as *generalis*, “a question of the nature quality, or classification of an action.”²¹ Ryan argues that modern rhetors who utilize this line of defense must “justify the quality”²² of their actions and Marsh contends that the question asked by this topic is “*to what extent can we excuse this act?*”²³
4. *Metalepsis* – While the first three stases could be seen as hierarchical, this final *stasis* stands alone. Indeed, regardless of an individual’s use of the other lines of defense, he or she could also use this line of argument in crafting an apologia. This Greek word is translated as “objection to a charge on technical grounds.”²⁴ As Nadeau explains, this stock argument asks whether or not the issue at hand is “subject to formal action.”²⁵ Cicero’s Latin term for this final *stasis* was *translatio*, meaning, “when the jurisdiction of the tribunal is questioned.”²⁶ Marsh argues that rhetors who utilize this defense ask “*do we have the right to judge?*”²⁷ and Ryan concludes that by relying on this argument, rhetors are able to

avoid condemnation from the individual/organization that has accused them by “appealing to a different judge or audience.”²⁸

A basic understanding of *stasis* theory is key to this project for two reasons. First, because these four lines of argument constituted the first attempt at systematically studying the rhetoric of self-defense, *stasis* theory provides modern scholars with an important understanding of how apologetic rhetoric was first understood, studied, and used in practical situations. Second, this system of categorizing defensive arguments provides an excellent framework for understanding and investigating how rhetors have crafted their own apologetic discourse for centuries. Thus, I will return to this system of organization in my discussion of apologetic strategies and goals later in this chapter.

Although individuals have relied on the rhetoric of self-defense for millennia, scholarship was largely silent on this topic in the period between the development of *stasis* theory in Greece and Rome until the twentieth century. A handful of articles examining the use of apologetic discourse by specific rhetors were published from 1956 to 1973.²⁹ However, it was Ware and Lunkugel’s work on the “generic criticism of apologia” that truly breathed new life into the study of this area of rhetoric.³⁰ In this seminal work, the authors advanced the argument that apologetic discourse was a unique and separate form of rhetoric. As a starting point, Ware and Linkugel borrowed terminology from the field of psychology in identifying four “modes of resolution:” denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence.³¹ Although this framework has proven extremely influential to subsequent examination of apologetic rhetoric, Ware and Lunkugel’s work also introduced some

specific restrictions about the genre of *apologia* that have been amended and expanded by more recent scholarship.

Perhaps the most significant change to this view of *apologia* deals with “who” can construct and present an apologetic defense. In the 1970s and 1980s, as the study of rhetorical genres grew in popularity, several scholars worked to provide more specific boundaries around Ware and Lunkugel’s description of *apologia* as the “speech of self defense.”³² In her 1981 work on the “scope of apologetic discourse,” Kruse presents the following criteria that must be met before classifying a rhetor as an “apologist.”

. . . an apologia can be ascribed only to the individual whose *ethos* has been challenged. One cannot produce apologetic discourse for another person, even though one might defend another’s character. An apologia is *self*-defense, and discourse produced by one individual but focused upon another is neither self-disclosure nor self-defense. . . . Just as one cannot produce an apologetic discourse for another individual, one does not generate apologetic discourse for something other than a human being. An apologia is an ethical defense, and since ethics or morality, or the lack thereof, are applicable only to humanity, we cannot speak of apologies made for anything other than people.³³

Although this conceptualization of apologetic discourse seems very narrow today, Kruse was not alone in limiting the classification of *apologia* in this manner. Indeed, virtually all scholarship on the topic of *apologia* during the 70s and 80s was limited to this type of analysis.³⁴

However, as the twentieth century drew to a close, scholars in the fields of communication, public relations, and business became interested in applying the well-developed theoretical framework surrounding apologetic discourse to groups and organizations who relied on the power of rhetoric to defend their actions in the wake of a

crisis situation. Hearit explains the rationale for this transition clearly in the following passage:

. . . the late 20th century undeniably witnessed the introduction of third parties into apologetic exchanges. Perhaps owing to the fact that we live in a ‘corporate’ society, when an individual wrongs another there seems to be no shortage of people who then step forward and say they were wronged as well. That is, due to individuals’ membership in groups and constituencies, they now place themselves in the midst of apologetic exchanges that historically have been between two parties.³⁵

Thus, as individuals, organizations, and scholars became aware of the growing influence of groups within society, the study of apologetic discourse rapidly expanded to include the field of organizational *apologia*.³⁶

As the study of *apologia* has developed over the past several decades, the concept of image management has also become vitally important to the study of crisis communication and public relations. Indeed, Downey argues that because of “the ‘explosion’ of knowledge in the 20th century . . . much of public rhetorical practice is an enactment of image management.”³⁷ Benoit’s groundbreaking work on Image Restoration Theory identifies five primary strategies that organizations can use to effectively “save face” following a crisis.³⁸ Benoit and Brinson offer the following definition of “image” in their analysis of AT&T’s crisis response: “by ‘image’ we mean the perceptions of the source held by the audience, shaped by the words and acts of the source.”³⁹

Thus, as it has expanded over the past forty years, scholarship focused on apologetic discourse has yielded a great deal of practical and theoretical knowledge that has benefitted both individuals and organizations who must defend themselves following a crisis. With this understanding of the history of *apologia* in mind, I will now turn to a brief examination

of the different types of crisis events that could precipitate the need for an apologetic response.

APOLOGETIC EXIGENCIES

In their 1975 analysis of Nixon's *apologia* for Watergate, Harrell, Ware, and Linkugel argued that "apology is a genre distinguished by the exigency which calls it forth. The theory of apologetics, as detailed by Ware and Linkugel, is concerned with the strategic . . . response which the rhetor fashions to extricate himself from the situation."⁴⁰ In a similar fashion, Kruse contends that "rhetors cannot offer apologies in vacuums, and they cannot defend their characters when there is no need to do so. The apologia is always a response to exigencies which exist in the rhetor's external environment; the rhetor does not create the exigence with the apologetic message."⁴¹ Thus, a rhetorical analysis of apologetic discourse must begin with an examination of the characteristics of the crisis event that necessitated such a response.⁴²

Scholars who study rhetorical discourse in both communication and public relations have isolated numerous characteristics that aid the critic in differentiating one crisis event from another. Understanding the varying nature of disparate crisis events aids the rhetor in selecting the appropriate strategy, or line of argument, to select in crafting a successful response. This section will briefly review the unique characteristics created by the "who" (the nature of the entity in crisis) and the "what" (the features of the crisis event) of a few of the most widely studied exigencies that will impact my analysis of the apologetic response to the events of the Salem witchcraft crisis in the second half of this chapter.

Who Is in Crisis?

Over the past several decades, scholarship on apologetic discourse has examined the role that rhetoric has played in responding to crises in a wide variety of public arenas ranging from entertainment and athletics to the political, religious, and corporate sectors.⁴³ The Salem witchcraft crisis is a unique event because it can be framed as either an individual or group crisis, or as a political or religious crisis. Indeed, in the weeks, months, and years following the last trial in Salem Village, community leaders framed their apologetic responses around a variety of different perspectives. Because the political and religious interests of the community had been so tightly interwoven throughout the crisis, leaders from each of these sectors constructed a response that met the demands of their unique leadership role within Salem Village and Massachusetts colony. Additionally, some of these leaders viewed the witchcraft crisis as a group or organizational issue, while others chose to address their personal responsibility for the tragedy. Thus, the complexity of this crisis event necessitated an equally complex rhetorical response.

Organizational Apologia. As I previously discussed, some scholars within the field of rhetoric have argued that apologetic discourse can only be crafted by individuals – and not by groups or organizations. Therefore, a great deal of work on the defensive rhetoric of organizations has been left to scholars in the areas of organizational communication, crisis communication, and public relations. In his *Ongoing Crisis Communication*, Coombs states that “no organization is immune to crises.”⁴⁴ It is from this basic premise that numerous scholars have devoted significant effort to analyzing, understanding, and improving the unique ways in which organizations prepare for, deal with, and recover from crises. Indeed,

Hearit argues that when they are crafted by organizations, “an apologia is not an apology (though it may contain one); rather, it is a response to a social legitimation crisis in which an organization seeks to justify its behavior by presenting a compelling, counter account of its actions.”⁴⁵

In penning their letters, sermons, and books, several of the Salem apologists were constructing a defense of both their own personal actions and the actions of a leadership group within the Salem community (e.g. ministers, justices, government officials). As such, these men faced some of the unique challenges that arise when groups attempt to rhetorically defend their role in a crisis event. In light of my analysis of the rhetoric of defense following the Salem witchcraft crisis later in this chapter, two of these constraints deserve particular note here.

The first of these deals with the special legal issues that arise for a group or organization that seeks to defend itself against accusations that imply illegal and/or immoral activity. Tyler describes this dilemma in the following passage:

Legal constraints can thus prevent organizations from acknowledging responsibility for harmful acts, and this rhetorical problem can have serious implications that it is important for us to consider. . . . The inability to admit guilt can have further serious ethical implications. Unable to acknowledge responsibility, corporate executives sometimes find themselves unable to mitigate damages.⁴⁶

In the case of apologetic rhetoric following the Salem trials, government officials had to take great care to acknowledge that mistakes had been made, without opening themselves up to legal prosecution for their involvement in the crisis.

Secondly, organizational leaders who wish to salvage their group's credibility have to strike a delicate balance between the negative rhetoric of accusation and the positive rhetoric of renewal. To this end, Hearit writes that

the re-legitimation of an organization is the primary motivation for a corporate response to a charge of wrongdoing. Such efforts typically require a dual strategy of a positive and a negative rhetoric. Corporations seek to distance themselves from their illegitimate behaviors and then create identifications with the public values they are reputed to have violated.⁴⁷

Indeed, although organizations must deal with tragedy and negativity in their apologetic discourse following a crisis, those who wish to rebuild their public image must not forget to remind their constituents of their many positive attributes as well. As my analysis will show, this strategy played a key role in the examples of organizational *apologia* following the Salem witchcraft crisis.

Individual Apologia. Although the colony of Massachusetts and the community of Salem had to deal with the aftermath of the witchcraft crisis from an organizational perspective, there were also many individuals who had to defend their individual involvement in the crisis. Indeed, the self-defense aspect of the apologetic discourse surrounding the Salem trials was critical, because as Gold argues, "any attack casting suspicion upon one's moral character may hinder one's ability to achieve goals and, unless deflected, may destroy their ability to function as a public leader."⁴⁸ As in the case of organizations recovering from a tragedy, rhetors who must respond to a personal crisis event or to their personal involvement in an organizational crisis also face a unique set of challenges. In many ways, the apologist's credibility is the single most important factor that he or she must grapple with in preparing his or her response to a set of allegations.

First, individuals must come to terms with their own personal history when setting out to defend themselves against an attack, because as Kauffman writes, “even the best crisis responses stand little chance of overcoming the relational history audiences share with a person or organization. . . . An audience will likely reject a speaker’s message during a crisis if the audience finds it ‘inconsistent with past actions.’”⁴⁹ Thus, each of the six Salem apologists discussed in this chapter faced a slightly different exigence that was entirely dependent on how Massachusetts colonials had perceived them before and during the crisis.

Additionally, as Harrell, Ware, and Linkugel point out in their analysis of President Nixon’s Watergate *apologia*, credibility plays an even larger role in the success of apologetic discourse when the audience lacks the facts necessary to make their own assessment of the situation. In speaking about Nixon’s apologies, these authors argue that

during [1973] the Nixon apologies were fully dependent upon public perceptions of rhetor credibility, largely because the public had little documentary evidence to use as a basis for judgment. Such evidence as was available was open to interpretation, doubt, and construction to both support and attack the President, depending upon who was doing the constructing and for what audience.⁵⁰

Although Watergate and the Salem witchcraft crisis were very different events, there is an interesting parallel between the roles played by fact in the success of the apologetic discourse following each of these crises. Indeed, in the weeks and months following the conclusion of the trials, the citizens of Massachusetts were not able to turn to any form of concrete evidence in making their own assessment of the events that had just transpired. Therefore, as was true in the case of Nixon’s apologies following Watergate, the success of

each of the Salem apologists depended largely on their audience's perception of their credibility.

Political Apologia. In addition to dealing with the challenges of an individual *apologia*, politicians must grapple with an additional set of expectations and responsibilities when deciding how to respond to crisis events.⁵¹ Again, several of these unique constraints are specifically important in contextualizing the analysis later in this chapter. First, as Brummett argues, “we do not merely choose candidates, we choose ways of being a nation and of defining ourselves [because] each candidate’s rhetoric answers questions such as: What sort of social order do we and should we have here?”⁵² Indeed, when a politician crafts an apologetic response, he or she must keep in mind that such a response reflects not only on his or her personal opinions, but also the beliefs that he or she holds about the very nature of society and government. Additionally, as Harrell, Ware, and Linkugel remind us, “central to the successful execution of . . . any political office is support of the governed at a level sufficient to provide enforcement of decisions by the office holder.”⁵³ Finally, Benoit contends that because politicians “make decisions that literally involve life or death,” it can be difficult for them to accept full responsibility for their actions because the public will likely fear “another mistake in the performance of their job” that could easily result in grave future consequences.⁵⁴

Because of the gravity of these constraints, a single piece of political *apologia* must address numerous issues. Gold contends that such responses “must explain or deny [the politician’s] actions, assure the audience of his [or her] proper motivation, reinforce in the public mind previous impressions of his [or her] good character, correct his [or her]

‘mistake’ if possible, and perhaps, as a final resort, admit his [or her] mistakes and promise to do better in the future.”⁵⁵ Additionally, Simons reminds his readers that in crafting an *apologia*, politicians need “to appeal to multiple and conflicting audiences.”⁵⁶ Benoit identifies these political audiences as “different constituencies (geographically as well as politically).”⁵⁷

The two political leaders who responded to the Salem crisis apologetically were Governor William Phips and Samuel Sewall, who both served as judges during the trials. Because the colonial government of Massachusetts was controlled by Great Britain during this period, neither Phips nor Sewall was elected. Instead, they were granted their political authority by royal appointment. However, the fact that these two men were *selected* and not *elected* did not spare them from the responsibility of responding to the witchcraft crisis. Indeed, as Benoit argues, political appointment “does not mean that reputation is unimportant.”⁵⁸ And, as my analysis in the second half of this chapter will illustrate, both of these men took their apologetic response very seriously.

Religious Apologia. A majority of the Salem apologists were religious leaders who had served in some form of advisory capacity during the witchcraft crisis. As I argued in Chapter II, these spiritual leaders held just as much, if not more, influence on policy decisions as the individuals who held political positions within the colony. Thus, it is not surprising that these men were responsible for drafting some of the earliest apologetic responses to the events that had taken place at Salem. However, as is the case for all religious apologists, this level of influence and authority did not come without a unique set

of responsibilities. In preparation for my analysis in the second half of this chapter, two of these constraints deserve specific attention.

First, as Goldzwig argues, “the public expects its religious leaders to be moral arbiters for society.”⁵⁹ Thus, audiences often hold religious apologists to a higher standard than other individuals who speak in defense of their actions. Not only must their responses be well thought out and appropriate to the crisis situation, but readers and listeners are also looking to these documents as a source of moral judgment and guidance in the aftermath of a crisis. Additionally, as Brown notes in her analysis of Jerry Falwell’s 1987 apologetic discourse, religious leaders must be simultaneously concerned with “warranting confidence in both [their] spiritual and secular leadership abilities.”⁶⁰

The four religious leaders who defended the events that had taken place at Salem certainly had to walk this delicate line – balancing their credibility as scriptural and spiritual leaders and their authority as trusted political advisors throughout the colony of Massachusetts. As I noted in the previous chapter, three of these men, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and Samuel Parris, had each played an integral role in setting the stage for the witchcraft crisis. However, as 1692 drew to a close, it was exceedingly apparent to individuals throughout New England that mistakes had been made by those leading the witchcraft trials. Thus, these three men faced a unique set of constraints that would shape the tone and strategy of each of their responses.

What Is the Nature of the Crisis?

Weick defines crises as “low probability/high consequence events that threaten the most fundamental goals of the organization.”⁶¹ Without a doubt, the Salem witchcraft

trials provide an excellent application of Weick's definition. However, while scholars have generally agreed that the events at Salem constituted a crisis situation, there is far less agreement about the nature of this crisis event. Indeed, some individuals have viewed this episode as an act of strategic social retribution while others have addressed it as an unfortunate example of idealism gone awry.

Because they realize that understanding the nature of a crisis is essential to crafting an appropriate response, many scholars from the fields of public relations and crisis communication have developed their own typology of crisis events. In his *Ongoing Crisis Communication*, Coombs organizes several of these scholars' ideas into a list of nine basic types, ranging from weak to strong crisis responsibility.⁶² *Rumors* demand the least amount of accountability from an organization or individual because they are generated from false information spread with the intent to slander or damage the organization/individual's reputation. Next along the continuum are *natural disasters*, which result from damage created by the weather that are commonly referred to as "acts of God." Toward the middle range of responsibility we find *malevolence*, which occurs when someone outside an organization expresses anger or attempts to create change and *workplace violence*, defined as when violent acts are committed by members of the organization itself.

Moving along the continuum toward stronger crisis responsibility, some organizations deal with accidents, which Coombs divides into two categories based on the cause of the problem: *technical and human breakdowns*. *Challenges* constitute the next division, which occur when hostile stakeholders who believe that the organization is not behaving responsibly and/or appropriately confront an organization. Finally, individuals

and/or organizations that face the greatest amount of crisis responsibility deal with *megadamage*, or accidents which create significant environmental damage, and *organizational misdeeds*, which occur when organizational leaders make decisions they know will place stakeholders at risk.

I will return to this discussion of crisis types in my analysis, because it is critical to note that the Salem apologists did not agree about the type of crisis they were all dealing with in their individual texts. Indeed, one of the interesting facets of the apologetic discourse surrounding the Salem witchcraft crisis is that there was no general consensus as to what type of mistakes (if any) had been made, or who should be held responsible for them. And, as I will discuss in more detail in the scholarly interlude that follows this chapter, contemporary scholars remain divided about these same issues.

APOLOGETIC GOALS AND STRATEGIES

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I will rely on *stasis* theory to provide a basic framework for my discussion of the various goals that rhetors try to achieve through constructing an apologetic defense. Several scholars have noted the compatibility of the ancient Greek/Roman *stasis* theory and the contemporary study of *apologia*. Indeed, in his 1982 essay on “*Kategoria* and *Apologia*,” Ryan argues that “Cicero’s four stases correspond to Ware and Linkugel’s four postures in apology for character.”⁶³ Additionally, in Marsh’s 1995 examination of “The Syllogism of Apologia,” he contends that “rhetorical stasis theory . . . can provide a hierarchical structure for crisis response strategies,” and concludes by echoing a call for “an integration of theories – an overarching view of crisis situations, postures and specific communication options.”⁶⁴ The framework I lay out in this section

addresses this request by pairing Ryan’s integration of *stasis* theory and Ware and Linkugel’s postures with corresponding apologetic goals and strategies. Table 1 below provides an overview of this structure.

Table 1: Rhetorical Stases/Apologetic Postures/Apologetic Goals/Apologetic Strategies

STASIS	FACT	DEFINITION	QUALITY	JURISDICTION
POSTURE	<i>Absolutive</i>	<i>Explanative</i>	<i>Justificative</i>	<i>Vindictive</i>
GOALS	Acquittal	Explanation	Evasion of Responsibility Ingratiation Rationalizing Reducing Offensiveness of the Event	Renewal Reconciliation Atonement Vindication
STRATEGIES	Denial Shifting the Blame Scapegoating	Differentiation	Defeasibility Bolstering Excuse Good Intentions	Transcendence Attack Accuser Mortification Corrective Action Full Apology

Stasis of Fact (Stochasmos/Conjecturalis)

When an apologist adopts the locus of fact as his or her primary defense, Ware and Linkugel argue that he or she takes on an absolutive position. They go on to write that “the absolutive speech is one in which the accused denies any wrong . . . [and] is primarily concerned with ‘clearing his name.’”⁶⁵ Thus, rhetors who seek out this line of defense are predominantly interested in being acquitted of all charges introduced in the *kategoria*. McClearey contends that the locus of fact should be viewed as a reformatory strategy because in seeking acquittal, the rhetor does “not attempt to change an audience’s meaning for, or affective response to, the issues that are in question.”⁶⁶ Thus, apologists who seek to

deny the charges brought against them and absolve themselves of all guilt can select from three different apologetic strategies: denial, shifting blame, or scapegoating.

Denial. Ware and Linkugel define denial as “the simple disavowal by the speaker of any participation in, relationship to, or positive sentiment toward whatever it is that repels the audience.”⁶⁷ Coombs adds to this definition in arguing that rhetors who employ denial contend “that there is no crisis” and that “no crisis means there are no victims.”⁶⁸ Although this is one of the simplest lines of defense, it is a strategy that is only an option for a small group of apologists. Indeed, rhetors who need to craft a speech of self-defense begin from a vulnerable position, and lying to their constituents/audience members/judges by denying something that they were in fact responsible for is a dangerous course of action. Thus, most apologists shy away from a simple denial, and instead seek acquittal through one of the other two strategies associated with the locus of fact.⁶⁹

Shifting Blame. The second strategy, shifting the blame, allows an organization or individual to simultaneously admit that the crisis exists and is problematic, but claim that another individual or organization is responsible for the situation. Benoit argues that this strategy “can be considered a variant of denial, because the accused cannot have committed the repugnant act if someone else actually did it.”⁷⁰ Therefore, when apologists elect to use this strategy, they do so because they seek to absolve themselves of all guilt and responsibility by blaming the crisis event on someone or something else.⁷¹

Scapegoating. At first glance, shifting the blame and scapegoating appear to be similar strategic choices. However, I turn to the work of Kenneth Burke to differentiate the complex rhetorical ritual of scapegoating from the more simplistic task of shifting blame

from one entity to another. Burke writes that “the scapegoat mechanism in its purest form, [is] the use of a sacrificial receptacle for the ritual unburdening of one’s sins.”⁷² As such, an apologist engages in scapegoating when he or she seeks to not simply shift the blame for some aspects of a crisis to another individual, but to symbolically transfer his or her sins and guilt to someone else.⁷³

Stasis of Definition (Horos/Definitiva)

This second locus is appropriately classified as an explanative apologetic posture. In their discussion of this strategic position, Ware and Linkugel contend that “in the explanative address, the speaker assumes that if the audience understands his motives, actions, beliefs, or whatever, they will be unable to condemn him.”⁷⁴ Therefore, a rhetor who adopts the locus of definition typically does so because he or she is not able to deny the charges raised in the *kategoria*. Rather, an apologist selects this line of defense because he or she believes that presenting the audience with additional contextual details about the act in question will sufficiently prevent him or her from being condemned. Thus, rhetors who rely on the locus of definition seek to achieve one primary goal: explanation of the event in question.

Differentiation. In their quest to defend themselves by providing some explanation of the crisis event, apologists typically utilize the strategy of differentiation. Benoit defines this tactic as an “attempt to reduce the negative affect associated with the act” under consideration.⁷⁵ Thus, in electing to use differentiation, the speaker attempts to create separation from the crisis through a process that many scholars today would refer to as reframing. Essentially, the primary focus of this line of argument is to change the audience’s

definition of a word or concept. Indeed, Ware and Linkugel argue that “strategies which place whatever it is about [the accused] that repels the audience into a new perspective can often benefit him in his self-defense.”⁷⁶ Therefore, differentiation is considered to be a “transformative” strategy because it involves creating a change in audience perceptions.⁷⁷

Stasis of Quality (Poietes/Generalis)

Benoit argues that those who rely on this third locus typically do so because they “are unable to deny performing the act in question.”⁷⁸ In adopting this line of argumentation, Ware and Linkugel explain that rhetors take a justificative posture that is more challenging than seeking acquittal or explanation because it “asks not only for understanding, but also for approval.”⁷⁹ Rhetors seeking to gain this approval from their audience through justification are typically trying to achieve at least one of the following four goals: evading responsibility for their actions, ingratiating themselves to their audience, rationalizing the choices they have made, and/or reducing the offensiveness of the crisis event. To achieve these goals, rhetors can select from four different strategies: defeasibility, bolstering, excuse, and good intentions.

Defeasibility. Those who utilize the strategy of defeasibility assert that their actions occurred because they lacked some amount of the information necessary to respond to the crisis correctly and effectively. Once again, this allows the rhetor to divert some of the responsibility for the crisis to another individual and/or organization. However, as Benoit points out in his analysis of President Bush’s use of defeasibility during his 2004 re-election campaign, while a “lack of information or power may serve as an excuse . . . it may raise doubts about whether the incumbent is likely to do better if given a second term in

office.”⁸⁰ Although Benoit is speaking specifically about presidential candidates in his essay, it is easy to see how claiming that he or she lacked the information necessary to effectively lead during a period of crisis could seriously damage *any* apologist’s credibility.⁸¹

Bolstering. Although this strategy is also considered reformatory, it is essentially the opposite of denial. In choosing this technique, the rhetor attempts to associate the individual or organization in crisis more closely with elements that the audience favors so that he or she will be viewed more positively by association. Simons argues that rhetors should select this strategy if they “have bragging rights; that is, if [they] can point to notable achievements in the past and the potential for more in the future.”⁸² Thus, apologists who utilize bolstering within their apologetic discourse often do so by placing a significant amount of emphasis on the most effective aspects of the individual and/or organization’s response to the crisis event.⁸³

Excuse. Providing some form of excuse or rationale for problematic actions is one of the most basic defensive strategies. Indeed, even a child select this line of defense when her teacher asks for a homework assignment, and the student replies that she does not have it because “her dog ate it.” Benoit argues that this technique is often effective because “we tend to hold others responsible only for factors they can reasonably be expected to control.”⁸⁴ Therefore, apologists typically provide excuses when they believe that additional information will convince the audience that the individual and/or group in crisis was facing a situation that was out of their control.⁸⁵

Good Intentions. Finally, apologists who rely on the good intentions strategy take great care to explain the rationale behind the individual or organization’s questionable

actions. Ware and Linkugel contend that “people respond differently to the actions of others when they perceive those actions to be intended than when they perceive them to be merely ‘a part of the sequence of events.’”⁸⁶ Thus, rhetors utilize this strategic position to claim that, at the very least, the individual or organization did not act with malice, and if possible, that he, she, or it acted with laudable intentions. Ultimately, the apologist hopes that through understanding the motivation behind any actions that contributed to the crisis event, the audience will realize *why* the individual or organization acted as they did, and, in turn believe that their actions were justified.⁸⁷

Stasis of Jurisdiction (Metalepsis/Translatio)

Ware and Linkugel contend that rhetors who select this final *stasis* have “greater ease in going beyond the specifics of a given charge” than those who select other lines of argument because the vindicative address “aims not only at the preservation of the accused’s reputation, but also at the recognition of his greater worth as a human being relative to the worth of his accusers.”⁸⁸ Thus, by crafting this type of apologetic response, a rhetor is typically attempting to achieve renewal, reconciliation, atonement, or vindication by questioning the authority of his or her audience to pass judgment and/or presenting some plan for moving forward past the initial crisis event. Indeed, individuals who select a strategy from this locus attempt to move past the specific accusations raised in the *kategoria* by focusing on the “larger picture” of the crisis event through the use one of five very diverse strategies: transcendence, attacking their accuser, mortification, corrective action, and full apology.

Transcendence. In utilizing this strategy, the apologist tries to reframe their present crisis situation in terms of a “larger context within which the audience does not presently view” the event.⁸⁹ Therefore, transcendence is considered transformative because it requires the audience to change their perspective before passing judgment. Ultimately, the rhetor who elects to use transcendence must appeal to values, attitudes, and beliefs that their stakeholders place more importance on than the effects of the crisis, and/or convince their audience that they do not possess the authority necessary to pass judgment on the matter in question.⁹⁰

Attack Accuser. Alternatively, the individual or organization in crisis might chose to attack their accuser rather than defending the actual charges they are facing. This tactic requires the spokesperson to diminish the credibility of their accuser and is often seen in political campaigns. Simons argues that apologists should strongly consider adopting this line of defense of the “credibility of [their] attackers is suspect.”⁹¹ Because this strategy could be viewed as an attempt to merely avoid addressing the issues raised in the *kategoria*, rhetors who adopt this line of defense must prove that their concerns about their accuser(s)’ credibility are valid if they want this strategy to succeed.⁹²

Corrective Action. Other individuals and/or organizations elect to take some form of action “to repair the damage created by the crisis or take action to prevent a repeat of the crisis.”⁹³ By adopting this line of argument, an apologist aims to achieve renewal, reconciliation, atonement, or vindication by pointing out positive actions taken *after* the crisis event rather than focusing on crafting a response to the accusations raised in the *kategoria*. Thus, in using this strategy, the rhetor hopes that Benoit is correct when he

claims that “the audience may well forgive a person who manages to assure them that, whatever that actor might have done in the past, he or she will take corrective action.”⁹⁴

Koesten and Rowland argue that adopting this strategy might be more critical for groups or organizations than it is for individuals because “a nation or an organization . . . cannot punish itself personally. But the organization can use words to demonstrate repentance and combine these words with substantive actions to prove the commitment to atone for past actions. These actions must be substantial enough to indicate true repentance, prayer, and charity.”⁹⁵ However, it is important to note that because the apologist can choose to discuss actions that either compensate for the past *or* prepare for the future, he or she can use this strategy without directly addressing issues of innocence or guilt.⁹⁶

Mortification. Much (if not all) of the scholarship on the use of mortification as an apologetic strategy argues that when a rhetor chooses to adopt this line of defense, he or she must present a formal apology.⁹⁷ Although offering a confession and appealing for forgiveness is certainly one way for an apologist to show mortification, I argue that these two strategies can be separated from one another. To create this distinction I turn to the following definition of mortification from the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

The feeling of disappointment, vexation, or humiliation caused by an untoward accident or (now usually) some rebuff, slight, or awkward or embarrassing situation.⁹⁸

According to this definition, an individual experiencing mortification could feel regret or humiliation for a situation that was merely accidental; this emotion need not be accompanied by any claim of responsibility. Thus, my analysis of the use of mortification

later in this chapter will illustrate how several of the Salem apologists were able to express regret for the witchcraft crisis without presenting a confession or asking forgiveness for any of their own personal actions.

Full Apology. The final strategy under the *stasis* of jurisdiction involves the guilty organization and/or individual admitting to the wrongful act, offering an apology (which is typically accompanied by expressions of regret or mortification), and asking for forgiveness from stakeholders and the public in general. Of course, as Benoit reminds his readers, the mere act of apology “cannot be guaranteed to improve one’s image. One must appear sincere.”⁹⁹ Therefore, because the use of this strategy requires the apologist to assume as least some degree of responsibility for the crisis and show a convincing measure of repentance for their actions, many rhetors are reluctant to choose this line of defense unless their culpability has been proven beyond the shadow of doubt and/or the act in question is especially offensive.¹⁰⁰

DEVELOPING AN APOLOGETIC RESPONSE

With all of the variables that exist in any crisis situation and the many different loci of defense that a rhetor can select from, deciding the best course of action in constructing an *apologia* is a challenging task. Indeed, scholars from the fields of rhetoric, crisis communication, and public relations have all worked to develop numerous, often complex theoretical frameworks to illustrate the best way to approach this complicated process.¹⁰¹ But despite this proliferation of work, I argue that Ryan summarizes the task of crafting a successful *apologia* best when he writes that “one must explicate the organic relationship between each speaker’s perception of the exigence and his response to it by identifying the

constraints and the audience(s) which mediates as ‘judge’ in their respective rhetorical situations.”¹⁰² In the second half of this chapter, I will analyze the ways in which the political and religious leadership of Massachusetts balanced the elements of their individual constraints and target audience in crafting seven different apologetic responses to the Salem witchcraft crisis.

The Rhetoric of the Salem Apologists

. . . rhetorical situations must be analyzed in the speech set. For both the accuser and apologist, one must explicate the organic relationship between each speaker’s perception of the exigence and his response to it by identifying the constraints and the audience(s) which mediates as “judge” in their respective rhetorical situations.

Halford Ross Ryan, “*Kategoria* and *Apologia*”¹⁰³

As I argued earlier in this chapter, understanding the exigence behind a rhetor’s apologetic response is an integral aspect of understanding the rationale for an apologist’s strategic decisions. With both this claim and Ryan’s argument that the rhetoric of *kategoria* and *apologia* should be understood and examined as a speech set in mind, I had divided the analysis portion of this chapter into two sections. First, I will provide an overview of the charges raised about the Salem witchcraft crisis before proceeding to examine the ways in which the Salem apologists elected to defend their actions.

KATEGORIA

I never thought Judges infallible; but reckoned that they, as well as private men, might err; and that when they were guilty of erring, standers by, who possibly had not half their judgment, notwithstanding, be able to detect and behold their errors.

*Letter of Thomas Brattle, F.R.S., October 8, 1692*¹⁰⁴

It is interesting to note that among the extant historical records of the Salem witchcraft crisis, the number of documents defending the events of 1691-1692 far exceeds the number of treatises written condemning the actions of judicial and religious leaders in both Salem Village and the colony of Massachusetts as a whole. Yet, as Rosenthal argues, the lack of accusations did not signal approval of the events that had transpired at Salem. Indeed, he writes that “a consensus in Massachusetts Bay quickly developed that something had gone wrong, but no formal inquiries into the nature of those errors occurred.”¹⁰⁵ Scholars have posited several reasons why so few individuals chose to voice formal accusations about the witch trials. In her *Devil's Snare*, Norton argues that the lack of condemnation might have been a result of the absence of proof necessary to accuse specific individuals, as “certain key pieces of evidence must subsequently have been destroyed, either by the participants themselves or by their descendants.”¹⁰⁶ She goes on to explain that she does not believe this disposal of evidence was part of some official conspiracy, but rather “that participants or their descendants decided individually, at different times and places, to remove traces of involvement in the trials from written record.”¹⁰⁷

Rosenthal has developed a very different explanation that removes some of this suspicion from the shoulders of those who survived the Salem crisis. He contends that in

the aftermath of the trials, the citizens of Massachusetts were forced to deal with the desire to blame someone or something for the events that had transpired without destroying the reputation of their colony and its political and spiritual leadership. As a result of this tension, he writes that a “delicate balance emerged between condemning the past and exonerating those who had participated in it.”¹⁰⁸

But regardless of why so few well-developed examples of *kategoria* from the months immediately following the crisis were written and/or have survived, those individuals who voiced their opposition to the trials made up for their negligible numbers with the strength and passion of their criticism. Of course, many of these critics were family members of the men and women who had been accused and/or executed during the height of the judicial proceedings, but others were simply observers who realized that something had gone terribly wrong in Salem Village.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps the single most fully developed example of *kategoria* from this period was drafted by Thomas Brattle on October 8, 1692, only days before Governor Phips would dissolve the court of Oyer and Terminer at Salem. Brattle was a wealthy and well-educated Boston merchant who was to serve as the treasurer of Harvard College from 1693 until his death in 1713. Although this now infamous letter was not widely published and circulated for nearly a century after it was penned, Rosenthal argues that “its value rests primarily in offering insights into how various people perceived the [Salem] episode, for the letter reveals as one of its key motifs that Brattle is not a lone voice crying in the wilderness.”¹¹⁰ Thus, I will begin my analysis of the apologetic discourse surrounding the Salem witchcraft

crisis by examining the chief criticisms that Brattle, and certainly countless others whose voices have been lost over the past three centuries, constructed of the events at Salem.

Before articulating his concerns about the events that had taken place at Salem, Brattle takes particular care to establish his credibility with his readers. He is aware that the trials had intensified many divisions that already existed within Salem and Salem Village, and does not want his assessment dismissed as simply the product of such tensions. To this end, he writes:

Obedience to lawful authority I evermore accounted a great duty; and willingly I would not practice any thing that might thwart and contradict such a principle. Too many are ready to despise dominions, and speak evil of dignities; and I am sure the mischiefs, which arise from a factious and rebellious spirit, are very sad and notorious; insomuch that I would sooner bite my finger's ends than willingly cast dirt on authority, or any way offer to reproach to it.¹¹¹

With this declaration of his sincerity and neutrality, Brattle begins his critique, focusing primarily on two elements of the proceedings: the evidence permitted in the courtroom and the individuals who played key roles in the trials.

Accusations Concerning Evidence

One of the most highly criticized aspects of the Salem crisis was the evidence that the accusers presented as proof that their neighbors were interacting with the Devil and participating in acts of witchcraft. In his October 1692 letter, Brattle raises many significant concerns about both the “evidence” itself, and the judges who accepted such forms of proof. Ultimately, Brattle would conclude that the quality of evidence permitted during the judicial proceedings at Salem contributed to the “irregular and dangerous methods” that were taken to resolve the growing witchcraft crisis.¹¹² He divides his

criticism of this evidence into two types: the testimony provided by the “afflicted” accusers and the myriad forms of proof provided by other sources.

Brattle’s evaluation of the afflicted girls’ testimony is primarily focused on the manner in which their accusations were presented in the courtroom. In this way, he not only questions the inherent veracity of their testimony, but also the protocol that the judges developed for introducing the girls’ testimony into evidence. More specifically, Brattle analyzes how the judges transformed the testimony of the afflicted witnesses/accusers from an example of rational or logical argumentation that is typical in a legal setting, into a presentation of sensory argumentation based primarily on the evidence drawn from the sight, sound, and touch of those present in the courtroom.

His first criticism examines how the judges, or the “Salem Gentlemen” as he refers to them, utilized the sense of sight as testimony. Brattle records that during the legal proceedings, “the Justices order the apprehended to look upon the said children, which accordingly they do; and at the time of that look, (I dare not say by that look, as the Salem Gentlemen do) the afflicted are cast into a fit.”¹¹³ In this way, he argues that by allowing the “fits” of the accused girls to serve as proof of the defendant’s guilt, the judges were relying on a form of fallacious reasoning that argumentation scholars refer to as *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Thus, Brattle contends that merely because the “afflicted” girls had “fits” *after* the accused individuals looked at them in no way proves that their fits were *caused* by such glances. Indeed, he goes on to ask, “if these apprehended persons are witches, and, by a look of the eye, do cast the afflicted into their fits by poisoning them, how [does it come]

about, I say, that, by a look of their eye, they do not cast others into fits, and poison others by their looks?"¹¹⁴

With doubt sufficiently cast on the use of sight as testimony, Brattle turned his attention to the examining how the judges relied on the sense of touch in the courtroom. He reports that while the afflicted girls are suffering from the fits induced by glances from the accused, "the apprehended are then blinded, and ordered to touch the afflicted; and at that touch, tho' not by the touch, (as above) the afflicted ordinarily do come out of their fits."¹¹⁵ Thus, Brattle again points out the fallacious reasoning underlying this form of "proof." However, this is not the only criticism he makes of relying on the sense of touch as testimony. Indeed, he goes on to argue,

I cannot but condemn this method of the Justices, of making this touch of the hand a rule to discover witchcraft; because I am fully persuaded that it is sorcery, and a superstitious method, and that which we have no rule for, either from reason or religion.¹¹⁶

Thus, Brattle contends that even if the touch of the accused did actually manipulate the emotional state of the afflicted girls, such a form of testimony should be rejected because the justices would, in effect, be encouraging and legitimizing acts of sorcery in the courtroom.

Finally, Brattle turns his attention to the verbal testimony provided by the afflicted girls. Like many of his contemporaries, he questions the voracity of the spectral evidence provided by the accusers:

. . . when the afflicted do mean and intend only the appearance and shape of such an one, (say G. Proctour) yet they positively swear that G. Proctour did afflict them; and they have been allowed so to do; as tho' there was no real difference between G. Proctour and the shape of G. Proctour. This,

methinks, may readily prove a stumbling block to the Jury, lead them into a very fundamental error, and occasion innocent blood, yea the innocentest blood imaginable, to be in great danger.¹¹⁷

However, his critique of this type of evidence does not stop there. Later in his letter, Brattle returns to this issue to shed further doubt on spectral evidence by questioning *how* the afflicted girls claim to view these spectres. He argues:

These afflicted persons do say, and often have declared it, that they can see spectres when their eyes are shut, as well as when they are open. . . . Can they see spectres when their eyes are shut? I am sure they lie, at least speak falsely, if they say so; for the thing, in nature, is an utter impossibility. It is true, they may strongly fancy, or have things represented to their imagination, when their eyes are shut; and I think this is all which ought to be allowed to these blind, nonsensical girls . . .¹¹⁸

Thus, Brattle not only questions whether or not spectral evidence should be granted credibility in the courtroom, but also argues that if the judges had elected to accept some credible examples of spectral evidence, they should have immediately rejected the testimony of those accusers who claimed to witness spectral activity with their eyes closed. With this line of criticism, Brattle also begins to question the credibility of *any* testimony provided by the afflicted girls, which I will analyze in more detail in a moment.

Ultimately, Brattle's critique reduces the events that transpired in the courtroom at Salem to a glorified theatrical performance rather than a legitimate legal proceeding. He sarcastically writes:

I would fain know of these Salem Justices what need there is of further proof and evidence to convict and condemn these apprehended persons, than this look and touch, if so be they effects of the said look and touch, and so perfect demonstration and proof of witchcraft in those persons. What can the jury or Judges desire more, to convict any man of witchcraft, than a plain demonstration, that the said man is a witch?¹¹⁹

With this argument, Brattle not only systematically casts doubt on each form of testimony presented by the afflicted girls, but he also contends that the judges effectively recognized and alerted others to the dubious credibility of this evidence by insisting on introducing additional forms of proof against each of the defendants.

Brattle then turns his attention to assessing the other types of evidence that the Salem justices used to convict individuals accused of witchcraft. First, he questions two forms of proof that the judges often sought by examination of the accused's body: the often discussed "witch's mark" and the presence or absence of the defendant's tears. Brattle records that the individuals suspected of witchcraft "are searched by a Jury" for evidence of a "preternatural excrescence," on their bodies.¹²⁰ Hoffer and Hull explain that, according to seventeenth century witchcraft theory, such "witch marks were places where the witch's 'familiar,' usually a small animal, suckled."¹²¹ But Brattle departs from this traditionally accepted line of reasoning in his letter by arguing that merely having a mark on one's body hardly qualifies as proof of witchcraft-related activity. Indeed, he wonders "what person there is, whether man or woman, of whom it cannot be said but that, in some part of their body or other, there is a preternatural excrescence. The term is a very general and inclusive term."¹²² In a similar fashion, Brattle turns his attention to the Salem justices' tendency "to censure and condemn the poor prisoner at the bar, because he sheds no tears."¹²³ Again, Brattle contends that the absence of crying on the part of the accused can not be interpreted as a sign of his or her confederacy with the Devil; for as Brattle reminds his readers, "some there are who never shed tears. . . . Who knows not that an ecstasy of joy will sometimes fetch tears, when as the quite contrary passion will shut them close up."¹²⁴

Finally, Brattle completes his attacks on the evidence used in the Salem proceedings by critiquing the various other pieces of testimony that were routinely introduced as proof of witchcraft activity. He writes

. . . that over and above the evidences of the afflicted persons, there are many evidences brought in, against the prisoner at the bar; either that he was at a witch meeting, or that he performed things which could not be done by ordinary natural power; or that she sold butter to a sailor, which proving bad at sea, and the seamen exclaiming against her, she appeared, and soon after there was a storm, or the like. But what if there were ten thousand evidence of this nature; how do they prove the matter of indictment!¹²⁵

In many ways, the final question he poses here: “how do they prove the matter of indictment,” summarizes the larger accusation that his letter makes about the evidence that the judges allowed to serve as evidence in the witchcraft trials. Throughout each of his attacks on specific forms of evidence, Brattle questions the reasoning that the “Salem Gentlemen” relied on in tying these various actions and experiences to witchcraft related activities.

Instead of directly condemning these uses of evidence as fallacious, Brattle asks his readers to seriously consider whether the justice’s warrants from sign and causation actually serve as proof of the gravely serious accusations levied at those accused of Satanic activity. Brattle’s strategy sheds a considerable amount of doubt on the justice’s claims and methodology, and created an exigency for those who would defend the Salem trials. Indeed, concerns about the use of evidence, such as those raised here by Brattle, would be addressed in virtually every defense of the events at Salem in the years immediately following the crisis.

Accusations Concerning Participants

Although Brattle clearly communicated the concerns that he had about the manner in which evidence was introduced in the Salem proceedings, this was far from the only issue he took with the witch trials. In reading his letter, it is clear that he had just as many, if not more, problems with those who participated in the events at Salem. Specifically, he raises concerns about three groups of individuals: the accusers, the accused, and the justices.

Brattle spends a majority of his efforts in this area critiquing the young girls who were, in many ways, at the center of the controversy in Salem. He argues that these accusers should not have been granted credibility for several reasons. First, he points out that the girls' behavior in the courtroom appears to be more like acting than genuine responses to acts of witchcraft. Brattle writes that "these afflicted persons, who have scores of strange fits in a day, yet in the intervals of time are hale and hearty, robust and lusty, as tho' nothing had afflicted them."¹²⁶

But despite his confidence in his assessment of the girls' credibility, Brattle realized that many people would still firmly believe that the accusers were truly affected by acts of witchcraft and visited by Satan and his confederates. So, he reminds his audience that the accused were not the only individuals who admitted to having spoken with the Devil in writing that:

. . . these afflicted children, (as they are called,) do hold correspondence with the devil, even in the esteem and account of the S.G., for when the black man, i.e. (say these gentlemen,) the Devil, does appear to them, they ask him many questions, and accordingly give information to the inquirer; and if this is not holding correspondence with the Devil, and something worse, I know not what is.¹²⁷

Thus, Brattle contends that in accepting the girls' testimony, Salem's justices were at the very least granting individuals with intimate knowledge of the Devil a legitimate voice in the courtroom; and at the worst, permitting the Devil himself to influence their legal proceedings.

To this end, he argues:

. . . the afflicted do own and assert, and the Justices do grant, that the Devil does inform and tell the afflicted the names of those persons that are thus unknown unto them. Now these two things being duly considered, I think it will appear evidence to any one, that the Devil's information is the fundamental testimony that is gone upon in the apprehending of the aforesaid people.¹²⁸

With each of these arguments firmly established, Brattle essentially blames the "afflicted" girls for all of Salem's problems. He writes that "it [is] very hard and unreasonable, that a town should lie under the blemish and scandal of sorceries and conjuration, merely for the inconsiderate practices of two or three girls in the said town."¹²⁹ Ultimately, he calls on the girls to confess that the whole of their testimony was "a mere fancy and delusion of the Devil's."¹³⁰

In addition to his assessment of the afflicted girls' actions, Brattle also articulates his concerns about the manner in which the accused participated in the Salem trials. He was primarily concerned with the legitimacy of the confessions that these individuals were encouraged to make throughout the legal proceedings. First, Brattle clearly states that he believes these "confessors" to be innocent. He argues that his "faith is strong concerning them, that they are deluded, imposed upon, and under the influence of some evil spirit; and therefore unfit to be evidences either against themselves, or any one else."¹³¹

Later in his letter, Brattle adds that his faith in the innocence of the accused is only supported by the “good shows of innocence” made by several individuals as they stood at the gallows.¹³² He recounts that

they protested their innocence as in the presence of the great God, whom forthwith they were to appear before: they wished, and declared their wish, that their blood might be the last innocent blood shed upon that account. With great affection they entreated Mr. [Cotton Mather] to pray with them: they prayed that God would discover what witchcrafts were among us; they forgave their accusers; they spoke without reflection on jury and Judges, for bringing them in guilty, and condemning them: they prayed earnestly for pardon for all other sins, and for an interest in the precious blood of our dear Redeemer; and seemed to be very sincere, upright, and sensible of their circumstances on all accounts.¹³³

Therefore, after illustrating his faith in the innocence of the accusers and providing the preceding account as evidence to support this belief, Brattle concludes that any “confessions” made by those accused of witchcraft should be viewed as lies and falsehoods – rather than evidence of confederacy with Satan.

Additionally, Brattle raises some serious concerns he has about the methods used to “encourage” defendants to produce a confession. He writes:

. . . others of them denied their guilt, and maintained their innocence for above eighteen hours, after most violent, distracting, and dragooning – methods had been used with them, to make them confess. Such methods they were, that more than one of the said confessours did since tell many, with tears in their eyes, that they thought their very lives would have gone out of their bodies; and wished that they might have been cast into the lowest dungeon, rather than be tortured with such repeated buzzings and chuckings and unreasonable urgings as they were treated withal.¹³⁴

Thus, Brattle argues that the use of torture during the Salem crisis effectively renders many (if not most or all) confessions of witchcraft-related activity worthless. It is interesting to note that Brattle raises concerns at the macro, rather than micro, level. He is not

concerned with making arguments against each specific case. Rather, Brattle works deductively – raising concerns about entire groups of individuals that he realizes will shed a considerable degree of doubt on the proceedings as a whole.

Finally, Brattle criticizes the larger and more general premise of witchcraft confessions as a whole. He argues that, not only are such confessions the result of delusions and/or torture, but they also constitute an act of blasphemy. Brattle explains his reasoning further in the following passage:

. . . some of the confessours are allowed to give their oaths; a thing which I believe was never heard of in this world; that such as confess themselves to be witches, to have renounced God and Christ, and all that is sacred, should yet be allowed and ordered to swear by the name of the great God! This indeed seemeth to me to be a gross taking of God's name in vain.¹³⁵

In this way, Brattle concludes his comments about the accused by arguing that not only were the confessions at Salem problematic, but that the larger concept of confessing to acts of witchcraft was an inherently sinful act. Thus, Brattle leaves his readers questioning every aspect of the defendants' role in the Salem proceedings.

Finally, Brattle turns his attention to the third group of participants in the Salem witchcraft crisis: the judges. Although he clearly argued that the young accusers should be held accountable for their role in the Salem crisis, Brattle also realized that these girls were still children who could (and should) have been guided and, when necessary, restrained and/or rebuked by the adult leaders within their community. As such, Brattle raises several important concerns about how the justices misused their authority in leading and shaping the events at Salem.

First, he argues that the justices recognized the problematic statements made by the accused during the trials, but rather than responding with condemnation, the “Salem Gentlemen” rationalized away these issues; compromising the integrity of the trials. Brattle provides his readers with the following example of his concerns:

These confessours, (as they are called,) do very often contradict themselves, as inconsistently as is usual for any crazed, distempered person to do. This the S. G. do see and take notice of; and even the Judges themselves have, at some times, taken these confessours in flat lies, or contradictions, even in the courts; By reason of which, one would have thought, that the Judges would have frowned upon the said confessours, discarded them, and not minded one tittle of any thing that they said; but instead thereof, (as sure as we are men,) the Judges vindicate these confessours, and salve their contradictions, by proclaiming, that the Devil takes away their memory, and imposes upon their brain.¹³⁶

Many people, both in the immediate aftermath of the Salem crisis and in the following three centuries, have tried to defend such mistakes by claiming that the justices were ignorant of the truth and were simply duped by extraordinarily unique and stressful circumstances. However, Brattle makes it clear that he does not feel such sympathy for the “Salem Gentlemen.” Indeed, he goes on to attack their behavior by pointing out that similar situations have arisen in other New England communities where “afflicted” victims have made witchcraft accusations, and yet, many justices have “never issued out their warrants to apprehend” the accused.¹³⁷ Thus, Brattle argues that these judges had the authority to prevent and/or stop the events at Salem. And further, because judicial leaders in other communities illustrated that it was possible to avoid a rapid escalation of such witchcraft accusations, the “Salem Gentlemen” stand especially culpable for the Salem crisis.

One of the more unusual aspects of Brattle's accusations occurs within his criticism of the justices' behavior when he diverges from his macro analysis of the events at Salem to specifically critique the actions of one individual. Brattle makes the following assessment of William Stoughton, who served as the chief magistrate throughout the Salem trials:

The chief Judge is very zealous in these proceedings, and says, he is very clear as to all that hath as yet been acted by this Court, and, as far as ever I could perceive, is very impatient in hearing any thing that looks another way.¹³⁸

A few pages later, Brattle offers the following example in support of his assessment of Stoughton:

I remember that when the Chief Judge gave the first jury their charge, he told them, that they were not to mind whether the bodies of the said afflicted were really pined and consumed, as was expressed in the incitement; but whether the said afflicted did not suffer from the accused such afflictions as naturally *tended* to their being pined and consumed, wasted, etc. This, (said he,) is pining and consuming in the sense of the law. I add not. (*italics in original*)¹³⁹

Although this analysis of Stoughton seems harsh, Brattle takes special care to note that he “very highly honours and reverences the wisdom and integrity of the said Judge,” but fears that “wisdom and counsel are withheld from [Stoughton's] honour as to this matter.”¹⁴⁰

Thus, Brattle essentially argues that the justices who presided over the trials at Salem (including Stoughton) were “well-meaning men” who “have thus far given ear to the Devil.”¹⁴¹

A Call to Action

Brattle explicitly reminds his readers that although few people are publically articulating their concerns about the Salem crisis, he is far from the only individual who has concerns about these events. Indeed, he argues that

there are several about the Bay, men for understanding, judgment, and piety, inferiour to few, (if any,) in N. E. that do utterly condemn the said proceedings, and do freely deliver their judgment in the case to be this, *viz.* that these methods will utterly ruin and undo poor N. E.¹⁴²

As he is drawing his letter to a close, Brattle does acknowledge that it will be difficult for the individuals involved in the Salem trials to go back and admit that their actions were wrong, however, he argues that “nothing is more honourable than, upon due conviction, to retract and undo, (so far as may be,) what has been amiss and irregular.”¹⁴³ With this qualification in mind, Brattle discusses two actions that he believes should be taken in the aftermath of Salem’s witchcraft crisis.

First, he specifically calls on the “afflicted” children to confess that their testimony throughout the Salem trials was “a mere fancy and delusion of the Devil’s,”¹⁴⁴ and urges the justices to “see and acknowledge”¹⁴⁵ the error of their ways. Additionally, he calls on Puritans throughout Massachusetts to appeal to God for the salvation of New England. Indeed, Brattle argues that almighty intervention is the *only* way for the colony to recover from the disastrous results of the sinful acts committed at Salem.

I think it is a matter of earnest supplication and prayer to almighty God, that he would afford his gracious presence to the said assembly, and direct them aright in this weighty matter. Our hopes are here; and if, at this juncture, God does not graciously appeal for us, I think we may conclude that N. E. is undone and undone.¹⁴⁶

As Rosenthal contends, Brattle's letter illustrated "with devastating insight the flaws in the proceedings judged by *the criteria of his age*" (italics in original).¹⁴⁷ However, it is essential to note that Brattle clearly articulated most of the major concerns that seventeenth century colonials (as well as twenty-first century historians) raised about the events that had taken place at Salem. Thus, it was with these *kategoria* firmly established in the minds of New Englanders that many of the men who had played leadership roles in the trials undertook the challenging task of constructing apologetic responses to the Salem witchcraft crisis.

APOLOGIA

Doubtless, the thoughts of many will perceive a great scandal against New-England, from the number of persons that have been accused, or suspected, for witchcraft, in this country: But it were easy to offer many things, that may answer and abate the scandal.

Cotton Mather, *Wonders of the Invisible World*¹⁴⁸

I will focus my analysis on seven primary texts written by major figures from the Salem crisis that exemplify a full range of apologetic stases. These include (in order of publication): "The Return of Several Ministers Consulted," likely crafted by Cotton Mather and delivered in June 1692; Cotton Mather's larger treatise on witchcraft, *Wonders of the Invisible World*, published in October 1692; Increase Mather's *Cases of Conscience* published shortly after his son's text; William Phips' "Letter to Earl of Nottingham" from February 1693; Samuel Parris' sermon titled "Meditations for Peace" that was delivered in November 1694; Samuel Sewall's "Apology on the Fast Day" from January 1697; and John Hale's *A Modest Enquiry*, finished in early 1698 and published in 1702. I have organized

my analysis of these works around these four stases, moving as Hermagoras would have taught, from fact to judgment.

Stasis of Fact

With the single exception of Samuel Sewall, all of the Salem apologists utilized the locus of fact in some way while defending the role that they played in the witchcraft crisis. Each of the men who adopted this line of argument was clearly interested in convincing his readers that he should not be held responsible for the events that had unfolded so quickly during the winter of 1691-1692. However, after hundreds of accusations, dozens of convictions, and twenty executions, it would have been impossible for any of them to deny that there was a crisis, or to argue that no one needed to be held accountable for the witchcraft trials that had quickly become infamous throughout New England. Indeed, silence and/or total denial of the situation was out of the question. But, despite these complications, six of the seven apologetic documents examined in this chapter contain some form of Ware and Linkugel's absolutive posture.

Denial. Each of the Salem apologists was a well-known leader within Massachusetts' political and/or religious communities. Thus, each of these men was a highly recognizable target for criticism. And, since each of them had played a role in leading the Salem legal proceedings, it was virtually impossible for any of them to deny involvement in the crisis. Because of these constraints, Cotton Mather did not utilize the strategy of denial to make any claims about his personal actions, but instead, to argue that not all of the convictions and executions at Salem had been unwarranted. In his *Wonders of the Invisible World*, he wrote:

. . . yet many of the persons thus represented, being examined, several of them have been convicted of a very damnable witchcraft: yea, more than one twenty have confessed, that they have signed unto a book . . . Now, by these confessions 'tis agreed, that the Devil has made a dreadful knot of witches in the country, and by the help of witches has dreadfully increased that knot . . .¹⁴⁹

Thus, while not denying that a crisis situation had existed, Mather adamantly professed that some of the work conducted by the judges at Salem had been both accurate and successful in finding and eliminating witches hiding throughout New England.

Shifting Blame. While the Salem apologists faced a nearly impossible task in denying a problem or their involvement in it, nearly all of them were interested in shifting the blame for the crisis to other individuals, groups, or even statutes. Indeed, both Hale and Parris claimed that the laws and legal procedures used throughout the proceedings at Salem were to blame for the problems that ensued. Hale articulated this argument most clearly and forcefully when he wrote that, “if there were an error in the proceedings in other places, and in New-England, it must be in the principles proceeded upon in prosecuting the suspected . . . Now as to the case at Salem, I conceive it proceeded from some mistaken principles made use of.”¹⁵⁰ Later in his text, he returned to this theme in saying that the “errors and mistakes” made in 1692 were largely a result of “following such traditions of our fathers, maxim of the common law, and presidents and principles, which now we may see weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, are found too light.”¹⁵¹ Additionally, in his “Meditations,” Parris wrote that “the improving of one afflicted, to inquire by who afflicts the other, I fear may be, and has been, unlawfully used to Satan’s great advantage.”¹⁵²

Although Hale and Parris attempted to divert some of the culpability away from human error entirely, a majority of the shifting occurred as individuals and groups turned the blame for the witchcraft crisis on one another. In their “Return,” the ministerial community insinuated that the judges should be held responsible, although they stopped short of blatantly arguing that they were to blame. They stated:

When the first inquiry is made into the circumstances of such as many lie under any just suspicion of witchcrafts, we could wish that there may be admitted as little as is possible of such noise, company, and openness, as may too hastily expose them that are examined, and that there may nothing be used as a test, for the trial of the suspected . . .¹⁵³

Thus, they questioned some of the procedures adopted by the judges, without directly accusing these men of bearing the sole responsibility for the crisis.

It is interesting to note that when Governor Phips penned his letter of defense, he did not turn blame for the crisis back on the colonial ministerial leadership. Instead, Phips was specifically interested in shifting the blame for what happened to other political and legal officials – specifically the Deputy and Lieutenant Governors of Massachusetts. First, Phips argued that although the Deputy Governor’s actions earned “the great dissatisfaction and disturbance of the people,” the Deputy continued to act of his own accord and “signed a warrant for [the] speedy execution . . . of five others who were condemned at the former Court of Oyer and Terminer.”¹⁵⁴ Additionally, Phips cast blame on the Lieutenant Governor for being “enraged and filled with passionate anger” in causing “the estates, goods and chattels of the executed to be seized and disposed of without [Phips’] knowledge or consent.”¹⁵⁵

The reminder of the apologetic arguments focused on shifting blame cast the culpability for the Salem crisis away from the religious and political leadership and on to the shoulders of the colonials themselves. In his *Modest Enquiry*, Hale took special attention to insinuate that the young girls in Salem, termed “accusers” by Brattle, were partially to blame for initiating the events of the crisis. He stated that he was afraid “some young persons through a vain curiosity to know their future condition, have tampered with the devil’s tools, so far that hereby one door was open to Satan.”¹⁵⁶

Cotton Mather took this argument one step further in his *Wonders*, where he shifted the blame for Salem’s witchcraft crisis onto individuals throughout New England who, he claimed, had turned from their Christian roots and become “wicked.” Indeed, he wrote that

those interests of the Gospel, which were the errand of our fathers into these ends of the earth, have been too much neglected and postponed, and the attainments of a hand-some education, have been too much undervalued, by multitudes, that have not fallen into exorbitances of wickedness; and some, especially of our young ones, when they have got abroad from under the restraints here laid upon them, have become extravagantly and abominably vicious. Hence tis, that the happiness of New-England, has been but for a time, as it was fore-told, and not for a long time, as has been deferred for us.¹⁵⁷

Cotton expanded upon this line of argument at several points throughout his *apologia*, specifically highlighting three “wicked” attributes that contributed to the events at Salem.

First, he argued that the use of magic throughout New England provided the Devil with an opportunity to gain entry into the colony. As my analysis in Chapter II illustrated, Mather and the other leading ministers in Massachusetts’ Puritan community believed that *any* use of magic – even “folk” or “counter” magic intended to aid those possessed by Satan

– was of diabolical invention. To this end, Mather asks his readers to consider whether, “a world of magical tricks often used in the world, may not insensibly oblige Devils to wait upon the superstitious users of them.”¹⁵⁸

Secondly, Cotton argued that all of the individuals living in Salem and Salem Village were partially responsible for the problems within their community because they had allowed themselves to become engaged in conflicts that provided the Devil with an opportunity to stir up hostility, unrest, and hatred. Thus, Mather wrote that “that which most of all threatens us, in our present circumstances, is the misunderstanding, and so the animosity, whereinto the witchcraft now raging, has enchanted us.”¹⁵⁹ But the younger Mather was not the only one to make this argument. Indeed, Hale agreed with Mather’s assessment in his *Modest Enquiry* when he wrote that “in many of these cases [at Salem] there had been antecedent personal quarrels, and so occasions of revenge, for some of those condemned, had been suspected by their neighbours several years, because after quarreling with their neighbours, evils had befallen those neighbors.”¹⁶⁰

After all, as Mather finally argued, if humans did not possess such a sinful nature, Satan could not gain a strong foothold within *any* community. Specifically, he stated:

the shake which the Devil is now giving us, fetches up the dirt which before lay still, at the bottom of our sinful hearts. If we allow the mad dogs of hell to poison us by biting us, we shall imagine that we see nothing but such things about us . . . were it not for what is in us, for my part, I should not fear and thousand legions of Devils; ‘tis by our quarrels that we spoil our prayers.¹⁶¹

Thus, Mather and Hale relied on the strategy of shifting blame to turn their apologetic discourse into a sermon of sorts on the human condition.

Scapegoating. Although the Salem apologists transferred some of the culpability for the witchcraft crisis to other individuals and groups, they were virtually united in naming the Devil as the central and fundamental source of the problems that had gripped Massachusetts during the winter of 1691-1692. Indeed, four of the six individuals who participated in the ritual of self-defense following the witchcraft crisis explicitly identified Satan as the being who was ultimately responsible for the sins committed in Salem Village.

Cotton Mather claimed that “an army of Devils is horribly broke in, upon the place which is the center and after a sort, the first-born of our English settlements: and the houses of the good people there are filled with the doleful shrieks of their children and servants, tormented by invisible hands, with tortures altogether preternatural.”¹⁶² Increase agreed with his son’s conclusion that the Devil was the ultimate cause of the witchcraft crisis, arguing that the episode had manifested “through the subtlety and power of the Devils, in consideration with the ignorance and weakness of men, involved amongst the guilty.”¹⁶³ Parris concurred with these conclusions, stating simply that “Satan’s wiles and sophistry” caused many individuals to “unduly suffer” from the events of the Salem witchcraft crisis.¹⁶⁴ Finally, Hale specifically asserted that as the crisis began to escalate, many individuals “grew amazed at the numbers and quality of the persons accused, and feared that Satan by his wiles had inwrapped innocent persons under the imputation of that crime.”¹⁶⁵

This collective call to hold the Devil responsible for the witchcraft crisis was supported by Cotton Mather’s argument that Satan was particularly motivated to attack Massachusetts because “New-England, a place of as serious piety, as any I can hear of, under Heaven, should be troubled so much with witches, I think, tis no wonder: where will

the Devil show most malice, but where he is hated, and hateth most.”¹⁶⁶ Mather goes on to claim that Satan was specifically provoked in this case because “the New-Englanders, are a people of God settled in those which were once the Devil’s territories, and it may easily be supposed that the Devil was exceedingly disturbed, when he perceived such a people here accomplishing the promise of old made unto our blessed Jesus. . . . Wherefore the Devil is now making one attempt more upon us; an attempt more difficult, more surprising, more snarled with unintelligible circumstances than any that we have hitherto encountered.”¹⁶⁷

Because the Puritans had already been “programmed” to view Satan as an enemy through the use of constitutive rhetoric before the events at Salem, making him the scapegoat for the witchcraft crisis was a relatively simple strategy. Indeed, in this case, the Devil was the easiest, most believable, and most cathartic scapegoat for the Puritan community. He provided a central figure whom all of the Massachusetts colonials could blame for the sins that had undoubtedly been committed during the witchcraft trials. And, because they believed him to be the “father of lies,” it would have been impossible for anyone (if anyone had been so inclined) to construct an adequate defense on his behalf.

Stasis of Definition

Differentiation. The primary way in which the Salem apologists utilized this strategy was in constructing the argument that the Salem witchcraft crisis should not be defined as a human crisis, but instead as an instance of spiritual warfare. As such, these authors argued that the crisis was not a legal or political matter, but a spiritual one. For, as Parris wrote, “God, for holy ends, though for what in particular is best known to himself, has suffered the evil angels to delude us on both hands.”¹⁶⁸

Cotton Mather also clearly articulated this position in the following excerpt from *Wonders of the Invisible World*.

If the Holy God should any where permit the Devils to hook two or three wicked scholars into witchcraft, and then by their assistance to range with their poisonous insinuations, among ignorant, envious, discontented people, till they have cunningly decoyed them into some sudden act, whereby the toils of hell shall be perhaps inextricably cast over them . . . transgressors, may more quickly here, than else where become a vengeance of him, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and, who walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks.¹⁶⁹

A few pages later, Cotton concluded this line of reasoning by arguing that “when Devils are exposing the grosser witches among us, God permit them, to bring in these lesser ones with the rest, for their perpetual humiliation.”¹⁷⁰

Samuel Parris also argued that the crisis was not one of legality, and that his congregants should view the episode as something that took place when, “through the righteous sovereign and awful providence of God, the grand enemy to all Christian peace, has been of late tremendously let loose in divers places hereabout, and more especially among our sinful selves, not only to interrupt that partial peace, which we sometimes enjoyed, but also, through his wiles and temptations, and our weakness and corruptions, to make wider breaches, and raise more bitter animosities between too many of us.”¹⁷¹

Likewise, the first question that Increase Mather responded to in his *Cases of Conscience* did not deal with methods of earthly judgment, but rather with the spiritual question:

Whether it is not possible for the Devil to impose on the imaginations of persons bewitched, and to cause them to believe that an innocent, yea that a pious person does torment them, when the Devil himself doth it, or whether Satan may not appear in the shape of an innocent and pious, as well as of a

nocent and wicked person to afflict such as suffer by diabolical molestations?¹⁷²

Thus, we can see that for New England's leading ministers, the problems at Salem resulted from critical spiritual questions, rather than earthly ones. Indeed, Increase went on to argue that courtroom guidelines could not be appropriately drafted without taking the answer to such religious questions into account.

Thus, the argument that the witchcraft trials should be viewed as spiritual matter rather than a legal one was a common line of defense following the Salem crisis. Indeed, each of the religious leaders who elected to craft an apologetic text about the Salem trials followed this same pattern. By differentiating between earthly and spiritual issues, the Salem apologists were able to reframe the witchcraft crisis and shift concerns from questions about how the trials unfolded to a discussion of the eternal battle between good and evil, which they could clearly argue was beyond human control. This argument, in turn, set up another line of reasoning that I will return to in my discussion of the *stasis* of jurisdiction – that judgment for the actions at Salem should rest in the hands of God, and not the leadership of New England.

Stasis of Quality

While the Salem apologists struggled to address the stases of fact and definition in their texts, they had a much easier time finding (or inventing) ways to justify their actions. Indeed, readers can recognize arguments related to the *stasis* of quality in six of the seven apologias analyzed in this chapter. Again, Samuel Sewall was the only rhetor to avoid this line of defense. Because of the public and tragic nature of the Salem crisis, apologists were

left with few options for either absolving themselves of guilt completely or explaining the crisis through differentiation. However, these men had no trouble finding ways to rationalize their actions and ingratiate themselves to their audience in hopes of convincing their readers that they should not be held personally responsible for the disastrous outcome of the Salem trials.

Defeasibility. Three of the Salem apologists claimed that a lack of knowledge or understanding should justify their participation in the witchcraft trials. Cotton Mather summarized this argument best when he wrote that the events that led to the Salem witchcraft crisis “have at worst been but the faults of a well-meaning ignorance.”¹⁷³ John Hale also argued that those leading the Salem proceedings were not aware of the errors that become apparent in retrospect. He famously wrote that “such was the darkness of that day, the tortures and lamentations of the afflicted, and the power of former presidents, that we walked in the clouds and could not see our way.”¹⁷⁴ Finally, within his personal apologetic sermon, one of Parris’ primary lines of defense was that the countermagic practiced by the servants in his household was “totally unknown” to himself or the members of his family until after these sinful acts had already occurred.¹⁷⁵

Bolstering. Several of these rhetors spent time specifically bolstering the reputations of the colonial leaders whose actions during the crisis were so often called into question. In his *Wonders of the Invisible World*, Cotton Mather took care to specifically note some of these individuals when he argued that

we are blessed with a Governour, than whom no man can be more willing to serve their Majesties or this their province . . . We are under the influence of a Lieutenant Governour, who not only by being admirably accomplished

both with natural and acquired endowments, is fitted for the service of their Majesties, but also with an unfooted fidelity, applies himself to that service. Our councilors are some of our most eminent persons, and as loyal subjects to the crown, as hearty lovers of their country.”¹⁷⁶

Increase agreed with his son in *Cases of Conscience* when he concluded that the leaders involved in the Salem crisis were “wise and good men.”¹⁷⁷ However, in their “Return,” the leading ministers of Massachusetts’ Puritan community reminded their parishioners that the wise actions of colonial leaders should not be attributed to the works of men, but rather to God, who was ultimately responsible for guiding Salem’s politicians and justices to identify and fight the presence of witchcraft in their community. They wrote, “we cannot but with all thankfulness acknowledge the success which the merciful God has given unto the sedulous and assiduous endeavors of our honorable rulers to detect the abominable witchcrafts which have been committed in the country.”¹⁷⁸

Additionally, in his personal defense of the role he had played in the Salem witchcraft crisis, Phips was careful to remind his audience of each of the actions he had taken to help bring the crisis to an end. Specifically, he pointed out that initially he “put an end to the Court [of Oyer and Terminer] and stopped the proceedings,” and that later, he “caused some of [the accused] to be let out upon bail and put the Judges upon considering a way to relieve others and prevent them from perishing in prison,” and toward the conclusion of the crisis, he “sent a reprieve whereby the execution [of five individuals] was stopped.”¹⁷⁹

Excuse. In his apologetic letter, Phips constructed the clearest example of this strategy within all seven of the apologetic texts examined in this chapter. He told the Earl

of Nottingham that the escalation of the crisis at Salem was outside of his control because during this period he had gone “to command the army at the eastern part of the province.”¹⁸⁰ Phips went on to point out that “when [he] returned [he] found people much dissatisfied at the proceedings of the Court.”¹⁸¹

Good Intentions. Several of the apologists very clearly argued that Salem’s political leaders did not enter the crisis with malicious intent, but rather, that these men had always attempted to wise and holy ends. Increase Mather wrote that these leaders “have acted with all fidelity according to their light, and have out of tenderness declined the doing of some things, which in their own judgments they were satisfied about.”¹⁸² Samuel Parris also utilized this line of defense in his sermon of personal apology when he assured his congregation that he had “always intended but due justice on each hand. . .”¹⁸³

John Hale agreed with Mather and Parris’ claims that the leaders of the witchcraft crisis began their work with the best of intentions at two different points in his *Modest Inquiry*. Toward the beginning of his analysis, Hale noted that he “observed in the prosecution of these affairs, that there was in the Justices, Judges and others concerned, a conscientious endeavour to do the thing that was right.”¹⁸⁴ Then again, at the conclusion of his text, Hale reminded his readers that he believed the justices’ intentions were pure. To this end, he wrote, “I am abundantly satisfied that those who were most concerned to act and judge in those matters, did not willingly depart from the rules of righteousness.”¹⁸⁵

Stasis of Jurisdiction

Although six of the seven apologetic documents examined in this chapter included some strategic line of defense from the locus of jurisdiction, the diverse nature of these

forms of argument created a great deal of diversity among the claims made by these men. Perhaps the most notable aspect of the application of these strategies is the simple fact that *none* of the Salem apologists chose to attack their accusers at any point within their apologetic documents. As I noted in my analysis of the *stasis* of fact, it was virtually impossible for anyone to deny that the witchcraft trials had ended in tragedy. Therefore, the issues raised in the *kategoria* were essentially justified, and the apologists had no reason to question their accusers. Instead, they utilized the strategies within the *stasis* of jurisdiction to argue that those touched by the crisis lacked the authority to pass judgment in this matter and should, consequently, move past specific accusations, and instead focus on the broader context of the tragedy and developing a plan to move forward and prevent another such tragedy from occurring in the future.

Transcendence. Three of the Salem apologists utilized the strategy of transcendence to appeal to God to serve as the ultimate judge of the events that had taken place in 1691-1692. In developing this line of defense, these authors ignored any earthly ramifications of the trials, bypassing human judgment and instead asking God directly for his intervention in resolving the crisis. One of the most well developed examples of transcendence came in the form of a prayer that Cotton Mather wrote to conclude his evaluation of the witchcraft crisis in his *Wonders of the Invisible World*. He wrote:

And now, oh thou hope of New-England, and the Saviour thereof in the time of troubles, do thou look mercifully down upon us, & rescue us, out of the trouble which at this time does threaten to swallow us up. . . . abhor us not, oh God, but cleanse us, but heal us, but save us, for the sake of thy glory . . . By thy spirit, lift up a standard against our infernal adversaries; Let us quickly find thee making of us glad, according to the days wherein we have been afflicted.¹⁸⁶

But Mather was not the only individual who was interested in turning to the judgment of God rather than that of humanity. Indeed, Parris argued in his “Meditations” that he always intended for his actions to be just, but that this justice should not be “according to men, but God, who knows all things most perfectly.”¹⁸⁷

In the preface to his *Modest Enquiry*, Hale also took care to note that God was the true judge of the affairs that took place at Salem. With this idea in mind, he wrote that his analysis of the Salem proceedings was predicated on “desiring [God’s] mercy in Jesus Christ to pardon all the errors of his people in the day of darkness; and to enable us to fight with Satan by spiritual weapons, putting on the whole armour of God.”¹⁸⁸ He went on to declare that God held the ultimate power and judgment over cases of witchcraft when he argued that “the Lord can and doth discover sorcerers, magicians, and all sorts of witches, when and as oft as he pleaseth; and sometimes leaves them to discover and betray themselves: And sometimes over-rules their master whom they serve, to intrap and deceive them.”¹⁸⁹ Finally, Hale concluded his analysis with the following plea:

So that we must beseech the Lord, that if any innocent blood hath been shed, in the hour of temptation, the Lord will not lay it to our charge, but be merciful to his people whom he hath redeemed . . . And that in the day when he shall visit, he will not visit this sin upon our land, but blot it out, and wash it away with the blood of Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁰

Indeed, since the Salem apologists argued that God was the only being who could truly know whether an executed individual had been guilty of the crime they were killed for, these men claimed that God should serve as the one true judge in this matter.

Perhaps the use of this apologetic strategy in the aftermath of the witchcraft crisis was best summarized by John Hale when he declared: “I leave the true state of their case, to a farther discovery, when the Lord please, in this life, or when God shall judge the secrets of men.”¹⁹¹ Thus, just as they did in the treatises that predicated the trials, the Puritan ministers asked their parishioners to suspend human judgment about these affairs, and instead wait for God’s assessment – no matter how long that wait might be.

Corrective Action. Four of the Salem apologists attempted to defend themselves by presenting a plan of action for recovering from the witchcraft crisis. In their “Return,” the ministers recommended that colonial leaders should take care to not end all witchcraft prosecutions, but instead, to continue “the speedy and vigorous prosecution of such as have rendered themselves obnoxious, according to the direction given in the laws of God, and the wholesome statutes of the English nation, for the detection of witchcrafts.”¹⁹² But, as time went on and the accusations about these statutes continued to increase, this line of defense was quickly abandoned.

In a similar fashion to the argument he had constructed in *Memorable Providences*, Cotton Mather argued that following the crisis, individual actions taken by all Puritan members of the Salem community was the key to their recovery. In *Wonders*, he claimed that this action should take the following forms:

I would most importunately in the first place, entreat every man to maintain an holy jealousy over his own soul, at this time, and think, may not the Devil make me, tho’ ignorant, & unwilling, to be an instrument of doing something that he would have to be done? . . . But then, let us more generally agree to maintain a kind opinion, one of another.¹⁹³

Mather returned to this plea at the end of his text when he reminded his readers that “juries are not the only instruments to be employed in such a work; all Christians are to be concerned with daily and fervent prayers.”¹⁹⁴

Parris also argued that each member of the Salem community needed to play a role in correcting the mistakes made during the witchcraft crisis. With this in mind, he argued that all members of his congregation should “let all bitterness, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice, - and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”¹⁹⁵

While Sewall’s apologetic statement also included an appeal for corrective action, he used this strategy in a slightly different manner than his fellow apologists, because he did not suggest a course of action for others. Rather, he called upon God to guide the purification of his own actions in the future. To this end, he prayed that God “would powerfully defend him against all temptations to sin, for the future, and vouchsafe him the efficacious, saving conduct of his word and spirit.”¹⁹⁶

Mortification. Because it is difficult to express remorse without confessing guilt, and a majority of the Salem apologists did not want to take responsibility for the witchcraft crisis, there are only two examples of rhetors relying on the mortification strategy in their apologetic discourse. In his “Meditations for Peace,” Parris expressed shame for the role he played in the trials, without claiming that his actions fueled or perpetuated the crisis. First, he declared that: “in that the Lord ordered the late horrid calamity . . . to break out first in my family, I cannot but look upon as a very sore rebuke, and humbling providence, both to myself and mine.”¹⁹⁷ Then, a few paragraphs later he wrote that he “desire[d] to lie low

under all this reproach, and to lay [his] hand on [his] mouth.”¹⁹⁸ In this way, Parris argued that the crisis was God’s will, but that he was mortified he had played any role in such a terrible event.

Similarly, John Hale did not express his *personal* mortification for participating the trials, but instead voiced regret and shame for all individuals who were alive during this period. He argued that “we have cause to be humbled for the mistakes and errors which have been in these colonies, in their proceedings against persons for this crime, above forty years ago and downwards, upon insufficient presumptions and presidents of our nation, whence they came.”¹⁹⁹ In this instance, Hale was able to show remorse for the witchcraft crisis, as an event, without claiming any personal culpability for the situation.

Full Apology. In the end, only two of the Salem apologists explicitly claimed personal responsibility for the witchcraft crisis and asked for forgiveness: Samuel Parris and Samuel Sewall. Parris openly admitted his errors by declaring: “as to the management of these mysteries, as far as concerns myself, I am very desirous upon further light, to own any errors.”²⁰⁰ He then went on to make the following confession and plea:

I do most heartily, fervently and humbly beseech pardon of the merciful God, through the blood of Christ, for all my mistakes and trespasses in so weighty a matter; and also all your forgiveness of every offence, in this or other affairs, wherein you see or conceive that I have erred and offended, professing, in the presence of the Almighty God, that what I have done has been, as for substance, as I apprehended was duty, however through weakness, ignorance, &c., I may have been mistaken.²⁰¹

It is important to note that Parris did not ask for the forgiveness of his parishioners.

Instead, he primarily appealed to God’s judgment. Thus, even in his apology, Parris

transcended earthly criticism and rebuke through placing significant emphasis on God as judge.

While Parris' apology was compelling, it was Samuel Sewall's declaration from 1697 that has been overwhelmingly remembered as the most contrite statement of guilt following the Salem crisis. He declared that he was

asking pardon of men, and especially desiring prayers that God, who has an unlimited authority, would pardon that sin and all other his sins; personal and relative: And according to his infinite benignity, and sovereignty, not visit the sin of him, or of any other, upon himself or any of his, nor upon the land.²⁰²

Just as Parris had, Sewall called upon God as the primary judge of this affair, however Sewall's apology also asked forgiveness of the individuals who would judge his actions on earth.

Additionally, it is essential to note that Sewall preceded this confession with the following statement of mortification: "Samuel Sewall, sensible of the reiterated strokes of God upon himself and family; and being sensible, that as to the guilt contracted, upon the opening of the late Commission of Oyer and Terminer at Salem . . . he is, upon many accounts, more concerned than any that he knows of, desires to take the blame and shame of it."²⁰³ Perhaps it was this combination of a direct confession with a plea for forgiveness and a statement of true contrition that has allowed Sewall to be remembered as the most repentant individual who played a role in the Salem witchcraft crisis.

A Final Thought: Assessing the Work of the Salem Apologists

Leaders of every kind must wrestle with conflicting demands upon their positions, requiring them to calculate tradeoffs, for example, between flexibility and consistency, cooperation versus competition, persuasion strategies versus power strategies – all the while as they may have to appear authentic, sincere, uncalculating.

Herbert W. Simons,
“A Dilemma-Centered Analysis of Clinton’s August 17th Apologia”²⁰⁴

Although the apologetic discourse following the Salem witchcraft crisis was extensive and included nearly every type of strategy within the four stases of defense, it is virtually impossible to deem these rhetorical appeals as either completely successful or unsuccessful. As I will discuss in the scholarly interlude that follows this chapter and again in my analysis of the public memory of the Salem trials, while society has remembered this historical episode as a tragedy, there is *still* no clear consensus as to who or what was truly responsible for the events of 1691-1692. To facilitate my analysis of this complex event, I will assess the work the Salem apologists conducted within each exigence (organizational, individual, political, and religious) outlined in my review of literature that began this chapter.

As a collective example of organizational *apologia*, the response to the Salem witchcraft crisis was essentially a failure. One of the most significant obstacles to drafting a successful response to this event as a group crisis was that there was not one primary unit working together to defend their actions. Instead, there were two dominant groups speaking in defense of themselves – politicians and religious leaders. And although these

two groups were clearly working to maintain their legitimacy, only one of the seven texts analyzed in this chapter details a unified attempt to speak as an organization. Each of the other six apologetic documents was an individual attempt to clear both the apologist's personal record, and in most cases, also that of the leadership group he belonged to.

In their apologetic documents, Governor Phips and John Hale relied primarily on the stases of fact and quality; hoping to purge both themselves and the political leadership of the colony as a whole of guilt through shifting blame, scapegoating, and justifying their personal actions. Hale was particularly concerned with the organizational need to restore his credibility through suggesting that corrective action should be taken to prevent similar situations from happening in the future. But, in contrast, Phips was specifically worried about ensuring his political future through stressing the fact that his constituents could still rely on his judgment. Ultimately, although these two men didn't suffer significant personal political setbacks following the Salem crisis, most scholars today argue that a great deal of the responsibility for initiating and fueling the witchcraft crisis should be assigned to the political leadership of Massachusetts and Salem village as a group. I contend that these politicians were not able to effectively defend themselves because they had no central voice to defend the legitimacy of their "organization" without concern for individual members.

As I mentioned earlier, the religious leadership worked more effectively as a group than the politicians had by writing a collective defense of their actions during the witchcraft crisis in writing "The Return of Several Ministers Consulted." These men also had an advantage over the colonial political leadership because they could not be held directly responsible for ordering the trials or deciding the fate of the accused. Indeed, although

their influence on the events that unfolded at Salem was likely just as significant as that of their political counterparts, the ministers were able to successfully shift blame to those making and carrying out official legal decisions.

Additionally, the ministers were ultimately successful in defending their own moral character by relying on the stases of definition and jurisdiction to argue that the events that had taken place at Salem were not within the realm of human control or judgment, but only took place within the purview of God's will for the Puritans living in the colony of Massachusetts. In utilizing these lines of defense, the religious leaders defined the witchcraft crisis, in Coombs' terminology, as a natural disaster or an "act of God." As I outlined earlier, when this type of event occurs, stakeholders tend to demand very little crisis responsibility from the individuals and/or organizations in crisis. Thus, the ministers were able to effectively defend their actions by placing all responsibility in the hands of God, whom, they argued, had a purpose for everything – even though it might be hidden from human understanding.

Finally, three individuals – Samuel Parris, William Phips, and Samuel Sewall – were specifically interested in defending their personal actions during the course of the crisis. In the eyes of history, Parris was certainly the least successful in constructing an adequate self-defense. I argue that his failure was due, at least in part, to his lack of apologetic focus. In his brief sermon, Parris relied on strategies from all four stases to defend his actions before his congregation. However, the specific combination of strategies he used created a significant degree of uncertainty about his defensive posture. In addition to claiming that the witchcraft crisis was part of the spiritual warfare that was beyond human control, he

also defended his own actions by rationalizing his behavior and ingratiating himself to his audience. But ultimately, Parris was also one of only two individuals to accept personal responsibility for the trials. Thus, his apologetic sermon sent an unclear message about his role in the crisis, and scholars today still lay significant responsibility for the event on his shoulders.

For the most part, Phips' letter of self-defense was successful. Indeed, while many scholars blame the political leadership as a whole for the Salem trials, he is hardly ever named as an individual who should bear primary responsibility for the tragedy. Instead, many people turn to Samuel Sewall when assigning blame for the Salem witchcraft crisis. This should not come as a surprise since Sewall elected to assume this responsibility himself in his "Apology on the Fast Day." However, while contemporary scholars often cite Sewall as one of the "villains" of this historical episode, they also typically view his apology and mortification as sincere. Therefore, although many today would agree that Sewall (and by extension the other justices) were partially responsible for the trials, they also remember him as the *one* individual who truly sought forgiveness for his actions. In turn, Sewall is remembered as the only individual who was honestly repentant about what took place during the winter of 1691-1692.

Notes

1. Thomas Brattle, F.R.S. to Unknown, 8 October 1692, in *Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648-1706*, ed. George Lincoln Burr (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), 169. This letter can also be accessed online through *The University of Virginia Library Electronic Text Center*, <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=Bur2Nar.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=all> (last accessed February 14, 2010).

2. Halford Ross Ryan, "Kategoria and Apologia: On Their Rhetorical Criticism as a Speech Set," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982): 255.
3. Sharon D. Downey, "The Evolution of the Rhetorical Genre of Apologia," *Western Journal of Communication* 57 (Winter 1993): 46.
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7. Michael R. Kramer and Kathryn M. Olson, "The Strategic Potential of Sequencing Apologia Stases: President Clinton's Self-Defense in the Monica Lewinsky Scandal," *Western Journal of Communication* 66 (Summer 2002): 348.
8. Wayne N. Thompson, "Stasis in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58 (1972): 141.
9. Halford Ross Ryan, introduction to *Oratorical Encounters: Selected Studies and Sources of Twentieth-Century Political Accusations and Apologies*, ed. Halford Ross Ryan (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1988), xvii.
10. Thompson, "Stasis in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," 134. For further discussion of the early influences on Hermagoras' work, see Ray Nadeau, "Hermogenes' On Stases: A Translation with an Introduction," *Speech Monographs* 31 (November 1964): 370-73.
11. Ray Nadeau, "Hermogenes' On Stases: A Translation with an Introduction," *Speech Monographs* 31 (November 1964): 369.
12. Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 83.
13. Nadeau, "Hermogenes' On Stases," 382.
14. Ibid., 370.
15. George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 103.
16. Charles Marsh, "The Syllogism of Apologia: Rhetorical Stasis Theory and Crisis Communication," *Public Relations Review* 32 (2006): 42.
17. Nadeau, "Hermogenes' On Stases," 370; 382.
18. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition*, 103.
19. Marsh, "The Syllogism of Apologia," 42.
20. Nadeau, "Hermogenes' On Stases," 370.
21. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition*, 103.
22. Ryan, "Kategoria and Apologia," 257.

23. Marsh, "The Syllogism of Apologia," 42.

24. Nadeau, "Hermogenes' On Stases," 370.

25. Ibid., 382.

26. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition*, 103.

27. Marsh, "The Syllogism of Apologia," 42.

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30. B. L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1973): 273-83.

31. Robert P. Abelson, "Modes of Resolution of Belief Dilemmas," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 3 (December 1959): 343-52.

32. Ware and Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves," 274.

33. Noreen Wales Kruse, "The Scope of Apologetic Discourse: Establishing Generic Parameters," *The Southern Speech Communication Journal* 46 (Spring 1981): 286.

34. For examples of these articles, see Ellen Reid Gold, "Political Apologia: The Ritual of Self-Defense," *Communication Monographs* 45 (November 1978): 306-16; Richard A. Katula, "The Apology of Richard M. Nixon," *Today's Speech* (Fall 1975): 1-5; Robert A. Vartabedian, "Nixon's Vietnam Rhetoric: A Case Study of Apologia as Generic Paradox," *The Southern Speech Communication Journal* 50 (Summer 1985): 366-81; Mary Kahl, "Blind Ambition Culminates in Lost Honor: A Comparative Analysis of John Dean's Apologetic Strategies," *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (Winter 1984): 239-50; Brant Short, "Comic Book Apologia: The 'Paranoid' Rhetoric of Congressman George Hansen," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 51 (Spring 1987): 189-203; and Gerald L. Wilson, "A Strategy of Explanation: Richard M. Nixon's August 8, 1974, Resignation Address," *Communication Quarterly* 24:3 (Summer 1976): 14-20.

35. Keith Michael Hearit, *Crisis Management by Apology: Corporate Response to Allegations of Wrongdoing* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 84.

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37. Downey, "The Evolution of the Rhetorical Genre of Apologia," 53.

38. William L. Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995).

39. William L. Benoit and Susan L. Brinson, "AT&T: 'Apologies Are Not Enough,'" *Communication Quarterly* 42 (Winter 1994): 75-76.

40. Jackson Harrell, B.L. Ware, and Wil A. Linkugel, "Failure of Apology in American Politics: Nixon on Watergate," *Speech Monographs* 42 (November 1975): 245.

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44. W. Timothy Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1999), 1.

45. Keith Michael Hearit, "'Mistakes Were Made': Organizations, Apologia, and Crises of Social Legitimacy," *Communication Studies* 46 (Spring 1995): 3.

46. Lisa Tyler, "Liability Means Never Being Able to Say You're Sorry: Corporate Guilt, Legal Constraints, and Defensiveness in Corporate Communication," *Management Communication Quarterly* 11:1 (August 1997): 65.

47. Hearit, "'Mistakes Were Made,'" 6.

48. Ellen Reid Gold, "Political Apologia: The Ritual of Self-Defense," *Communication Monographs* 45 (November 1978): 307.
49. James Kauffman, "When Sorry is Not Enough: Archbishop Cardinal Bernard Law's Image Restoration Strategies in the Statement of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Clergy," *Public Relations Review* 34 (2008): 259. In this excerpt, Kauffman is summarizing work originally reported in Kimberly Cowden and Timothy L. Sellnow, "Issues Advertising as Crisis Communication: Northwest Airlines' Use of Image Restoration Strategies During the 1998 Pilot's Strike," *The Journal of Business Communication* 39 (April 2002): 193-219.
50. Harrell, Ware, and Linkugel, "Failure of Apology in American Politics," 246.
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52. Barry Brummett, "Burkean Scapegoating, Mortification, and Transcendence in Presidential Campaign Rhetoric," *Central States Speech Journal* 32 (Winter 1981): 254.
53. Harrell, Ware, and Linkugel, "Failure of Apology in American Politics," 247.
54. William L. Benoit, "Hugh Grant's Image Restoration Discourse: An Actor Apologizes," *Communication Quarterly* 45 (Summer 1997): 255.
55. Gold, "Political Apologia," 307.
56. Herbert W. Simons, "A Dilemma-Centered Analysis of Clinton's August 17th Apologia: Implications for Rhetorical Theory and Method," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86 (November 2000): 443.
57. Benoit, "Hugh Grant's Image Restoration Discourse," 255.
58. Ibid.
59. Steve Goldzwig, "A Rhetoric of Public Theology: The Religious Rhetor and Public Policy," *The Southern Communication Journal* 52 (Winter 1987): 148.
60. Gwen Brown, "Jerry Falwell and the PTL: The Rhetoric of Apologia," *The Journal of Communication and Religion* 13 (March 1990): 16.
61. Karl Weick, "Enacted Sensemaking in a Crisis Situation," *Journal of Management Studies* 25 (1988): 305.
62. W. Timothy Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1999). Coombs discusses these types on pages 60-62 and then arranges them on a continuum of responsibility on page 124. I have drawn significantly from Coombs' discussion in overviewing these crisis types.
63. Ryan, "*Kategoria* and *Apologia*: On Their Rhetorical Criticism as a Speech Set," 257.

64. Marsh, "The Syllogism of Apologia," 41; 43.
65. Ware and Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves," 283.
66. Kevin E. McClearey, "Audience Effects of Apologia," *Communication Quarterly* 31:1 (Winter 1983): 12.
67. Ware and Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves," 276.
68. Coombs, *Ongoing Crisis Communication: Planning, Managing, and Responding*, 125.
69. For examples of studies examining the use of denial in apologetic discourse, see Richard A. Katula, "The Apology of Richard M. Nixon," *Today's Speech* 23 (Fall 1975): 1-5; Joseph R. Blaney and William L. Benoit, "The Persuasive Defense of Jesus in the Gospel According to John," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 20 (1997): 25-30; Michael R. Kramer and Kathryn M. Olson, "The Strategic Potential of Sequencing Apologia Stases: President Clinton's Self-Defense in the Monica Lewinsky Scandal," *Western Journal of Communication* 66 (Summer 2002): 347-68; and Joseph R. Blaney, "Restoring the Juridical Image: *Apologia* for *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 24 (2001): 94-109.
70. Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies*, 75.
71. For examples of studies examining the use of shifting blame in apologetic discourse, see Maria E. Len-Rios and William L. Benoit, "Gary Condit's Image Repair Strategies: Determined Denial and Differentiation," *Public Relations Review* 30 (2004): 95-106; Timothy Coombs and Lainen Schmidt, "An Empirical Analysis of Image Restoration: Texaco's Racism Crisis," *Journal of Public Relations Research* 12 (2000): 163-78; Kimberly Cowden and Timothy L. Sellnow, "Issues Advertising as Crisis Communication: Northwest Airlines' Use of Image Restoration Strategies During the 1998 Pilot's Strike," *The Journal of Business Communication* 39 (April 2002): 193-219; and William L. Benoit, Joseph R. Blaney, and LeAnn M. Brazeal, "Blowout!: Firestone's Image Restoration Campaign," *Public Relations Review* 28 (2002): 379-92.
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74. Ware and Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves," 283.
75. Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies*, 73.
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77. For examples of studies examining the use of differentiation in apologetic discourse, see Gerald L. Wilson, "A Strategy of Explanation: Richard M. Nixon's August 8, 1974, Resignation Address," *Communication Quarterly* 24 (Summer 1976): 14-20; William L. Benoit and James J.

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78. Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies*, 76.

79. Ware and Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves," 283.

80. William L. Benoit, "President Bush's Image Repair Effort on Meet the Press: The Complexity of Defeasibility," *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 34 (August 2006): 303.

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83. For examples of studies examining the use of bolstering in apologetic discourse, see Brant Short, "Comic Book Apologia: The 'Paranoid' Rhetoric of Congressman George Hansen," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 51 (Spring 1987): 189-203; James Kauffman, "When Sorry Is Not Enough: Archbishop Cardinal Bernard Law's Image Restoration Strategies in the Statement on Sexual Abuse of Minors by Clergy," *Public Relations Review* 34 (2008): 258-62; William L. Benoit and Anne Czerwinski, "A Critical Analysis of USAir's Image Repair Discourse," *Business Communication Quarterly* 60 (September 1997): 38-57; and William L. Benoit and James J. Lindsey, "Argument Strategies: Antidote to Tylenol's Poisoned Image," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 23 (Winter 1987): 136-46.

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102. Ryan, "*Kategoria* and *Apologia*: On Their Rhetorical Criticism as a Speech Set," 255.

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105. Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 184.

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151. Ibid., 149.
152. Samuel Parris, "Meditations for Peace," (sermon, Salem Village, MA, November 1694).
153. Cotton Mather, "The Return of Several Ministers Consulted," in *Salem-Village Witchcraft: A Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England*, eds. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1972), 118.
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157. Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, 4.
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159. Ibid., 12.
160. Hale, *A Modest Enquiry Into the Nature of Witchcraft*, 34.
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174. Hale, *A Modest Enquiry Into the Nature of Witchcraft*, 150.
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177. Mather, *Cases of Conscience*, 70.
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CHAPTER V

INTERLUDE:

THE SCHOLARLY ASSESSMENT OF THE SALEM WITCHCRAFT CRISIS

There can, indeed, hardly be a doubt that, in some instances, the confessing persons really believed themselves guilty. To explain this, we must look into the secret chambers of the human soul; we must read the history of the imagination, and consider its power over the understanding. We must transport ourselves to the dungeon, and think of its dark and awful walls, its dreary hours, its tedious loneliness, its heavy and benumbing fetters and chains, its scanty fare, and all its dismal and painful circumstances. We much reflect upon their influence over a terrified and agitated, an injured and broken spirit. We must think of the situation of the poor prisoner, cut off from hope; hearing from all quarters, and at all times, morning, noon, and night, that there is no doubt of his guilt; surrounded and overwhelmed by accusations and evidence, gradually by insensibly mingling and confounding the visions and vagaries of his troubled dreams with the reveries of his waking hours, until his reason becomes obscured, his recollections are thrown into derangement, his mind loses the power of distinguishing between what is perpetually told him by others and what belongs to the suggestions of his own memory: his imagination at last gains complete ascendancy over his other faculties, and he believes and declares himself guilty of crimes of which he is as innocent as the child unborn.

Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*¹

In his review of the contemporary scholarship dealing with the Salem witchcraft crisis, historian David Goss argued that modern explanations of what took place in 1692 have turned from “the naïve narratives and interpretations of the antiquarians of the Victorian era,” and “greatly expanded our knowledge of New England Puritan society, its beliefs, its laws, and its interrelationships.”² The preceding quote comes from one of these “antiquarian” explanations – Upham’s historical account of the Salem trials that was first

published in 1867. And yet, although twenty and twenty-first century scholars have certainly deepened the complexity of their understanding of the crisis over the past one hundred and fifty years, those of us living today will likely never know *exactly* what happened in Salem Village from 1692 to 1693.

However, as Goss highlighted, the daunting task of understanding the witchcraft crisis has certainly not stopped three centuries of scholars from speculating about what might have caused this small Puritan community to accuse, imprison, interrogate, and in some cases execute dozens of their neighbors and fellow church members for the “crime” of witchcraft. In his 2003 review essay, Aune argued that scholarly examinations of this topic have led to at least seven different explanations of what “caused” the trials:

psychological/psychoanalytic, sociological, medical, religious, anthropological, feminist, and political.³ This article offers a succinct, but well-reasoned summary of these major lines of thought, and serves as an excellent introduction to a majority of the work that academicians have done on this topic in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

With Aune’s discussion as a starting point, I will use this interlude to briefly review six of the leading scholarly explanations about what took place at Salem that have been developed through the work done in six corresponding academic fields: sociology, psychology, religious studies, feminist studies, jurisprudence, and politics. My goal here, and throughout this project, is not to advocate for any one of these explanations over the others. Instead, I argue that in order to gain the fullest understanding of why the witch trials took place, it is essential to examine a diverse array of factors that *all* contributed to the escalation and intensity of the Salem crisis. Thus, my claim is that in one way or

another, each of the following “explanations” contributed to the overall climate, beliefs, and actions that created a crisis situation in Salem Village.

Sociological Factors

The problems which confronted Salem Village in fact encompassed some of the central issues of New England society in the late seventeenth century: the resistance of back-country farmers to the pressures of commercial capitalism and the social style that accompanied it; the breaking away of outlying areas from parent towns; difficulties between ministers and their congregations; the crowding of third-generation sons from family lands; the shifting locus of authority within individual communities and society as a whole; the very quality of life in an unsettled age.

Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*⁴

In appropriate fashion for a “social” history, Boyer and Nissenbaum’s text focuses primarily on the social fabric that connected the inhabitants of Salem Village in the years leading up to and throughout their “witchcraft crisis.” The authors spent a majority of their time analyzing the divisions created by wealth, geography, family conflict, and support for the local minister – Samuel Parris. Ultimately, Boyer and Nissenbaum argued that these divisions were especially significant during this period because all of New England, and especially this Puritan community, stood on the brink of a cultural shift. Thus, “what confronted Salem Village, as seems clear in retrospect, was not a handful (even a large handful) of ‘deviants.’ It was a group of people who were on the advancing edge of profound historical change.”⁵

Boyer and Nissenbaum viewed community division as a root cause for Salem Village’s problems in 1692. The authors argued that these factional conflicts are central to

understanding the whole event because “the witchcraft episode did not generate the divisions within the Village, nor did it shift them in any fundamental way, but it laid bare the intensity with which they were experienced and heightened the vindictiveness with which they were expressed.”⁶ They argued that factors such as church membership, wealth, geography, commerce vs. agriculture, Town vs. Village, and Samuel Parris sparked a significant amount of this division. However, Boyer and Nissenbaum ultimately concluded that the conflict between Salem’s most prominent families – the Putnams and the Porters – was at the root of most community conflicts in 1692 because “the family of Thomas Putnam, Jr., readily wove its personal grievances into a comprehensive vision of conspiracy against Salem Village as a whole.”⁷

Psychological Factors

In the long run what was remarkable here was less the antics of the girls than the way the community received them. It was the community – extended in time to include the whole Bay Colony – that would in the end suffer the most devastating attack of possession, and not only the ignorant, but its best minds. The nearly universal belief in devils and witches could not alone explain the capitulation of reason which took place. . . . A people whose natural impulses had long been repressed by the severity of their belief, whose security had been undermined by anxiety and terror continued longer than could be borne, demanded their catharsis. Frustrated by the devils they could not easily reach, they demanded a scapegoat and a full-scale lynching. And they got it.

Marion L. Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts*⁸

Starkey’s analysis of the trials was initially published in 1949, making it one of the first major scholarly assessments of the Salem episode since Upham’s mid-nineteenth

century investigation. And today, it is still one of the most unique approaches to understanding and writing about the witchcraft crisis. In contrast to her contemporaries, Starkey's work does not resemble a chronology and is not filled with footnotes or references to primary source data. Instead, *The Devil in Massachusetts* reads more like a work of fiction. In the preface to her work, Starkey wrote that she had "in general avoided analysis in the technical sense, and eschewed the jargon which goes with it" because her "emphasis has been on telling the story, making psychological interpretation implicit in the course of narrative rather than a thing by itself."⁹

Her primary argument was that the crisis conditions which developed during the first part of 1692 were a result of a society of individuals so repressed that they became, literally, hysterical. More specifically, she wrote that

in modern terms they all of them, in one degree or another, had hysteria. Of course hysteria itself is no simple phenomenon, and it was here inevitably complicated by the varying emotional patterns the different girls brought to it. Some of them may have verged on the psychotic.¹⁰

This psychological explanation gives way to an interesting analysis of who was responsible for the trials. At several points, Starkey specifically removed blame from the young girls who served as accusers, arguing that from their perspective, "the truth was no longer simple, no longer explicable even to them," that they "were having a wonderful time, [as] their present notoriety was infinitely rewarding to childish natures beset by infantile cravings for attention," and that "they lived in a dream, their senses so spellbound that they did not know how bad a dream it was."¹¹

But while she removed this responsibility from the girls, Starkey ultimately leaves her readers with a contradictory view about where they should assign blame. On one hand, she claimed that “surely no one was ‘plotting’” when the crisis began and that “the community at large had become bewitched, magistrates no less than the girls – bewitched by a kind of mad hypnosis, expressed in panic on the one hand and crusading fervour on the other.”¹² But later she argued that “no one was wholly innocent in the tragedy; it was chargeable to a kind of collective guilt on the part of all Massachusetts in falling away from the high consecration of its founders.”¹³ Thus, readers are left to believe that Salem’s witchcraft crisis was not the result of human error, but rather, the product of psychological instability, unable to be diagnosed or treated in a society not yet aware of mental disorders.

Religious Factors

Unfortunately Mather’s vanity at this favorable outcome of his efforts was such that he rushed into print with *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcrafts*, describing the Goodwin case, with all its symptoms in detail; and just as newspaper stories of crime seem to stimulate more people to become criminals, so *Memorable Providences* may well have had a pernicious power of suggestion in that troubled era. . . . Even today the generally accepted version of the Salem tragedy is that Cotton Mather worked it up, aided and abetted by his fellow parsons, in order to drive people back to church.

Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England*¹⁴

The history of witch hunting throughout the western world has often been causally linked to the influence of religious teachings, authorities, and texts. And especially in Europe, this assessment bears a great deal of merit. Stuart Clark has highlighted several important aspects of Catholic belief that show the ways in which religion was an important

influence on the European witch trials.¹⁵ First, he noted that because Catholicism was highly tied to ritual, Catholics believed that the correct way to deal with witchcraft was to take an active stance against it. In fact, Clark noted that some Catholic theologians claimed that the reason why God allowed witchcraft to be practiced on earth was because he also provided humanity with a way to fight it through rituals such as exorcisms and inquisitions. Additionally, the Catholic Church seemed to be very interested in what Clark termed the “sensational aspects of demonism,” or the relationship between sex and witchcraft.

However, the Puritan perspective on witchcraft varied significantly from the Catholic beliefs that were so influential in Europe.¹⁶ Puritans rejected all forms of ritual and relied on faith, prayer, worship, and legitimate medical practices to cure both physical and spiritual ailments. Additionally, Puritan ministers underscored the fact that all magical practices should be viewed as sinful – whether they were conducted with beneficial or detrimental intentions. Therefore, folk magic practices that had once co-existed (although not always peacefully) with Christianity in Europe were rejected by the religious members of the Salem community. Even the practice of counter-magic, intended to cure someone of possession or prevent demons or witches from entering households were rejected by Puritan ministers.¹⁷

Thus, Morison articulated a common and reasonable argument in his *Intellectual Life of Colonial New England*. Indeed, my own analysis in Chapter II is closely related to this religious explanation. However, while I agree with Morison’s assessment of the influential nature of Mather’s text on witchcraft, I would contend that his explanation is

too simplistic. In crafting religious artifacts such as *Memorable Providences*, the Puritan ministers discussed in the previous chapter went much further than simply scaring their congregants into believing in witchcraft. Instead, it was their construction of an entire worldview based on a specific set of religious beliefs that served as an instigating factor for the witchcraft crisis.

Gender-Related Factors

Like many of my predecessors, I am also concerned with the meaning of witchcraft for New England's first settlers. But my more pressing concern is why most witches in early American society were women. By confronting the definition of the witch in its historical setting, by understanding the ideological and social sources of New Englanders' preoccupation with women-as-witches, we can better understand why the witch still lives in our imagination today.

Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*¹⁸

Karlsen's text is comprised of two types of analysis. First, she provided a detailed demographic analysis of the New Englanders who were accused of witchcraft and those who accused them. Through the use of charts and specific examples, she attempts to identify trends based on the age, sex, marital status, presence or absence of male family members, and wealth of individuals accused of witchcraft. Although this information does offer the reader some thoughts to consider, Karlsen herself admitted at the beginning of chapter four that this demographic analysis alone cannot account for the diversity of people who were tried and executed as witches. Instead, she asked "what was it about the accused that set them apart even from other women in similar positions? The answer most likely to emerge

from recent historical accounts of New England witchcraft is that the character or personalities of New England's witches made them suspect in their neighbor's eyes."¹⁹

Therefore, Karlsen's second type of analysis provided a discussion of the stereotypes surrounding female witches that could be traced back to the *Malleus Maleficarum* and the role of possession within witchcraft outbreaks. The key to understanding both of these elements is Karlsen's argument that "gender issues *were* religious issues, and perhaps nowhere is that more vivid than in the case of witchcraft."²⁰ Thus, she claimed that the development of the stereotypical female witch was a result of both religious and secular beliefs. Indeed, Karlsen wrote that

the social process that transformed women into witches in New England required a convergence of belief on the part of both the townspeople and the religious and secular authorities that these women posed serious threats to society. . . . There were two types of dangerous trespass: challenges to the supremacy of God and challenges to prescribed gender arrangements.²¹

Further, she concluded that possession "was a dramatic religious ritual through which young females publicly enacted their struggle to avoid internalizing the evil of witchcraft. . . . By employing the language of possession in their sermons and writings – complete with witches and demons – ministers doubtless hoped to save their young charges from damnation."²²

Judicial and Legal Factors

In the Anglo-American legal tradition, criminal trials have evolved in complexity over the past thousand years. . . . The Salem witchcraft trials occurred in the middle of this evolution. . . . There were juries, and the government was in charge of the prosecution, but there were no lawyers for the defendants, and the ideal of fair trial was overwhelmed by superstition

and rumor. Throughout, the Salem cases were dominated not by book law, that is, written rules scrupulously followed by professional officials of the court, but by folk beliefs shared by judges, jurors, witnesses, and even the accused.

Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: A Legal History*²³

True to its title as *A Legal History* of the Salem witch trials, Hoffer began his text with the claim that the legal proceedings held in Salem, Massachusetts in the 1690s were responsible “in some small but palpable way” for our modern belief that “it is better for a hundred guilty people to escape conviction than for one innocent person to be wrongly found.”²⁴ Accordingly, Hoffer structured his argument around the major players and setting of the trials by viewing them “as a dramatic performance. . . . The courtroom is a stage, with the chief characters moving about as though they were characters in a play. The judge and jury are the audience; the accusers, accused, and witnesses are the players.”²⁵ The majority of his text provides a more detailed analysis of these elements.

Throughout this text, Hoffer presented three specific critiques about how the judicial system itself was responsible for beginning and sustaining the witchcraft crisis. First, he pointed out that the sheer quantity of the accusations and convictions overwhelmed the county’s legal system because it was “simply were unsuited to unmasking falsity on such a scale.”²⁶ But additionally, he reminded readers that the individuals assuming leadership roles during this period had no significant experience to aid them in handling the growing tide of accusations. Indeed, Hoffer argued that

in Salem the bench was experienced, but none of the judges were respected jurists. These may have been, as some scholars argue, a group of able men, but they were not lawyers, and no law was cited or debated in the court.

Instead, folk witch-finding techniques like the touching test and examination for Devil's marks were allowed.²⁷

And to complicate matters further, “no lawyers stepped forward during the trials to help the accused.”²⁸ Ultimately, Hoffer concluded that this void of any legitimately knowledgeable individuals leading the proceedings, and “without [any] informal controls on superstition and bad feeling, the formal system of law had no way to sort fact from overheated fiction”²⁹ As a result, “unsubstantiated rumor and innuendo [dictated] the outcome of cases” in Salem in ways that had never been seen before in Massachusetts.³⁰

Hoffer concluded his analysis by arguing that Salem's witchcraft crisis helped to transform America's legal system. He wrote that once the trials had ended, “the General Court responded by passing a bill against witchcraft modeled upon the Jacobean Statute. . . . It locked the door on spectral evidence first shut by Phips, for the offenses punishable under the law were clear: practicing conjuration, entertaining any evil spirit, taking up the dead from the earth, and using sorcery, whereby any person shall be killed or lamed”³¹ As a result, Hoffer noted that “every society in recorded time has had criminal trials of some kind. . . . A few of these trials have changed the way that people looked at their world. The trial of the ‘Salem witches’ is one of these critical trials.”³²

Political Factors

The dramatic events of 1692 can be fully understood only by viewing them as intricately related to concurrent political and military affairs in northern New England. . . . When I started my research, I expected the accusers' familial origins to prove to be important for my analysis, but I had no idea that this book would become what it has: an exploration of the history of frontier warfare and its impact on the collective mentalité of an entire

region. . . . The histories of King William's War, King Philip's War (its equally brutal predecessor in the 1670s), and the Salem witchcraft crisis are intricately intertwined.

Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare* ³³

Norton began her text by stating that although she “expected to base [her] volume largely on a feminist reinterpretation of familiar materials,” her analysis of primary sources from the period led her to write a history of the Salem witchcraft crisis that was largely based on the local political and military climate during the 1690s.³⁴ In order to support her thesis, Norton argued that the chronology and scope of the crisis must be taken into account. She concluded that other scholars have limited their studies to the events that occurred in Salem and neglected important episodes taking place in neighboring communities during 1692. As such, she argued that “the term *Salem witchcraft crisis* is a misnomer; *Essex County witchcraft crisis* would be more accurate.”³⁵

The “meat” of Norton’s argument has three parts. First, and most fundamentally, the Puritan residents of Salem, Massachusetts in 1692 feared the Devil. Secondly, they feared the “heathen” Wabanaki Indians who brutally killed large numbers of European settlers. Because of this group’s violent behavior and lack of belief in God, the Puritans felt that these native people were carrying out the Devil’s work. Finally, the residents of Essex County were deeply convinced that the practice of witchcraft was the work of the Devil. In turn, individuals who had some connection to the feared Wabanakis could be easily connected to the Devil, and thus also the practice of witchcraft. Norton argued that it was the connection of witchcraft to these two elements they feared most: the Indians and the

Devil, that led individuals in Essex County to react as they did to a few young girls' witchcraft allegations.

... the witchcraft crisis of 1692 can be comprehended only in the context of nearly two decades of armed conflict between English settlers and the New England Indians in both southern and northern portions of the region. The ongoing frontier war, and the multiple fears it generated – in Maine and New Hampshire, in Essex County, and in Boston itself – thus supplies the answer to the question I posed earlier: why was Salem so different from all previous witchcraft episodes in New England?³⁶

Indeed, it is Norton's construction and support of this argument throughout the text that sets her narrative apart from those of other historians.

Notes

1. Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft: With an Account of Salem Village and A History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects* (Boston, MA: Wiggin and Lunt, 1867), 2:409-10.
2. K. David Goss, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: A Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 51.
3. James Arnt Aune, "Witchcraft as Symbolic Action in Early Modern Europe and America," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 765-99.
4. Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 180.
5. *Ibid.*, 109.
6. *Ibid.*, 69.
7. *Ibid.*, 151.
8. Marion L. Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Enquiry into the Salem Witch Trials* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), 46-47.
9. *Ibid.*, 17.
10. *Ibid.*, 45.
11. *Ibid.*, 45; 47; and 209.
12. *Ibid.*, 102.
13. *Ibid.*, 265.
14. Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1956), 258-59.

15. Stuart Clark, "Protestant Witchcraft, Catholic Witchcraft," in *The Witchcraft Reader* ed. Darren Oldridge (London, UK: Routledge, 2005), 165-79.
16. Ibid.
17. Information about Puritan beliefs concerning magic and witchcraft can be found in many texts including: Richard Godbeer, *The Devils' Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and David D. Hall, *Puritans in the New World: A Critical Anthology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
18. Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1987), xiii-xiv.
19. Ibid., 117-18.
20. Ibid., 119.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 244.
23. Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: A Legal History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997), vii.
24. Ibid., ix.
25. Ibid., 6.
26. Ibid., 68.
27. Ibid., 89.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 61.
30. Ibid., 42.
31. Ibid., 135.
32. Ibid., vii.
33. Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 5.
34. Ibid., 4.
35. Ibid., 8.
36. Ibid., 12.

CHAPTER VI

PUBLIC MEMORY:

REMEMBERING THE SALEM WITCHCRAFT CRISIS

Yeah, but it speaks to how alienated we all are from history . . . For generations the witch trials were such an embarrassment that no one would discuss them. A proper history of them wasn't even written until the end of the nineteenth century. Now look at it – it's a carnival.

Katherine Howe, *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane* ¹

To remember is defined as the ability to recount something that happened in the past. Yet the act of remembering has many shapes, currencies, and valences. . . . Memory has connected us with the larger world on many levels, linking the lived with the folkloric, the children of tomorrow with the ancestors of yesteryear, the personal lives of individuals with the shared experience of the collective.

Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain" ²

As a field of study, public memory has grown significantly since French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs' *On Collective Memory* was published posthumously in 1950.³ In his introduction to the 1992 edition of this work, Lewis A. Coser argues that "Halbwachs was without a doubt the first sociologist who stressed that our conceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve our present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present."⁴ Today, public memory scholars from a variety of academic disciplines continue to explore the memories crafted by the public, or the collective, to discover what impact such

memorializing has on the present and the future. Indeed, individuals from a diversity of fields including sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, English, and communication have contributed to the rich and multifaceted ways in which scholars understand and frame public memory today.⁵ The rhetorical sub-field of public memory studies has grown significantly over the past few decades as scholars have begun to examine the ways in which a wide range of artifacts, from physical monuments to movies and television, serve a memorializing function in contemporary American society. But, before beginning my own analysis of the public memory of the Salem witchcraft crisis, I will first turn to an introductory review of some of the major scholarly arguments and conclusions that serve as a theoretical framework for this chapter.

A Survey of the Field of Public Memory

. . . the framework of collective memory confines and binds our most intimate remembrances to each other. It is not necessary that the group be familiar with them. It suffices that we cannot consider them except from the outside – that is, by putting ourselves in the position of others – and that in order to retrieve these remembrances we must tread the same path that others would have followed had they been in our position.

Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*⁶

To appropriately set the stage for my rhetorical examination of the twenty and twenty-first century public memory of the Salem witchcraft trials, I have devoted the first portion of this chapter to a brief review of public memory scholarship. This discussion is framed around seven conclusions about public memory that are especially pertinent to the

present examination of America's contemporary collective memory of the Salem crisis: (1) public memory cannot be equated with history, (2) public memory is crafted by groups, (3) public memory fluctuates, (4) public memory takes many forms, (5) public memory is often communicated through the narrative, (6) public memory is uniquely tied to physical spaces, and (7) public memory informs the present and the future.

PUBLIC MEMORY CANNOT BE EQUATED WITH HISTORY

As the field of public memory has grown over the past few decades, scholars have devoted a great deal of work to debating how the study of public memory should be related to the study of history. In her review essay, Zelizer contends that the field of history has been impacted by the growth of memory studies more than any other academic discipline, and that historians often argue "that memories should give way ultimately to the more heavily weighted mode of historical accounting where they can be tested against other sources."⁷ However, not all scholars in the field of history share this opinion. Indeed, French historian Pierre Nora writes the following about the relationship between these two areas of study:

Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. . . . History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. . . . In the end, a society living wholly under the sign of history could not, any more than could a traditional society, conceive such sites for anchoring its memory.⁸

Rather than arguing for the superiority of either historical or memory studies, a third group of scholars has attempted to create some middle ground between these opposing positions. This group claims that although the individuals who study memory and those who examine

history conduct their research in different ways, their scholarship is driven by a common purpose and challenge. Historian David Thelen articulates this position in writing that “the challenge of history is to recover the past and introduce it to the present. It is the same challenge that confronts memory.”⁹

A significant amount of the tension that scholars in both fields must contend with emerges from the question of accuracy. Traditionally, historians have considered historical accuracy to be a non-negotiable requirement for all legitimate research into events that took place in the past. However, with the growth of memory studies, many scholars have begun to ask questions such as the one Steven Knapp posed in a 1989 essay: “why should it even matter, if it does, that an authoritative narrative correspond to historical actuality?”¹⁰

Sociologist Robin Wagner-Pacifici dealt with this issue in a similar manner almost a decade later when she asked what “it means for collective memory to be simultaneously termed fictional and non-fictional, or neither.”¹¹ Many scholars who advocate this position claim that no matter how many memories a researcher pieces together to understand a historical event, complete accuracy can never be achieved. Zelizer articulates this well in writing that “it is rare that a continuum of memories reproduces an event in its entirety. That is to say, the partiality of memory is almost never fully resolved, regardless of how many recollections are put together to that effect.”¹²

Indeed, many scholars argue that because humans rely on language to record and/or transmit their recollections of the past, the absolute truth of historical events cannot be found in the annals of history. To this end, Bruner writes that

the human's experiencing of the world has a fictional dimension because language, through its very use, necessarily distorts. However, the term "distorts" should not be taken to mean that there is a purely undistorted form of human communication beyond ideology. Every articulation necessarily highlights some features at the expense of others . . .¹³

Although many historians would find this description of the natural bias of language to be extremely problematic, public memory scholars have chosen to embrace this conclusion as an advantage. In this way, individuals such as Davis and Starn contend that by shifting their focus away from the goal of "accuracy," public memory scholars have been able to challenge the problematic "biases, omissions, exclusions, generalizations, and abstractions of history."¹⁴

Thus, while it is clear that scholars in the fields of history and public memory have openly disagreed with one another about this fundamental philosophical issue, it is encouraging to discover the ways in which each of these disciplines have benefitted from their relationship with the other. Sociologist Gil Eyal articulated this well in writing that "on the one hand, history opened itself up to the subaltern and the popular, as witnessed, for example, by the emergence of the discipline of oral history; but on the other hand, memory too opened itself up to history, and historians and intellectuals began to construe their work as an 'art of memory.'"¹⁵ Indeed, it is clear that the scholarship produced by both historians and public memory scholars has benefitted from the many ways in which these two fields have challenged one another.

This relationship is fundamental to my analysis in the second half of this chapter. In examining the texts that have shaped our contemporary public memory of the Salem

crisis, I will consider both the historical accuracy and the fictional quality of what we remember today about the events of 1692. My goal for this project is not to place history and memory in opposition to one another, but rather, to investigate how our public memories have been rhetorically framed in several different textual contexts for a variety of different purposes. I will, however, offer a critical analysis of how the historical accuracy and/or inaccuracy of our memories has impacted the arguments made by rhetors in twenty and twenty-first century rhetorical artifacts.

PUBLIC MEMORY IS CRAFTED BY GROUPS

The choice to use terms such as “public” or “collective” in titling the field of memory studies was certainly not accidental. Indeed, the understanding that groups, publics, or collectives (as opposed to individuals) craft public memories is an integral component of this genre of work.¹⁶ In her 1996 essay, Wagner-Pacifici argues that the collaborative nature of public memories provides a rich source of power for the individuals who worked together to craft them, for public memory “lives with greatest strength in those forms that bring public event-memories and private memories together.”¹⁷

Additionally, if public memories are created, gathered, and shared by a group, it is only natural that they would play an integral role in shaping the identity of that group. Thus, it is clear why public memory scholar Michael Kammen argues that the public memory of a country “is ideologically important because it shapes [the] nation’s ethos and sense of identity.”¹⁸ Historian Beverley Southgate provides a more detailed analysis of the role of public memory in identity creation when he writes that

we resort to memory for the fabrication and the maintenance of our identities; we look to narrative threads from past to present in order to establish continuities in, and meaning for, our selves. It is only by doing this, as Hume long since concluded, that we have any notion of who on earth we are.¹⁹

However, because the collective nature of public memories is key to developing the identity of a group, the inherent tensions that come with such negotiations become a significant facet of the creation of public memory. To this end, it is important to briefly examine the ways in which power struggles influence the creation and display of public memories.

In his contribution to *Remaking America*, John Bodnar argues that pre-existing power dynamics within a society play a key role in the development of that group's public memories. More specifically, Bodnar writes that

public memory speaks primarily about the structure of power in society because that power is always in question in a world of polarities and contradictions and because cultural understanding is always grounded in the material structure of society itself.²⁰

Sociologist Anna Lisa Tota echoes this idea in her review essay when she writes that “the public definition of a controversial past might represent a key to understanding how power relations are articulated and composed within a social or national context.”²¹ For, as English scholar Efraim Sicher so appropriately notes, the “different needs of various groups wishing to adapt national and personal origins” are at play in the development of public memory.²²

With these ideas in mind, my analysis in this chapter will argue that an examination of both the content of public memories and the manner in which they are displayed can provide a great deal of insight into which sub-groups and/or individuals hold the greatest degree of power within a society. For this project, I have chosen to examine artifacts that

are representative of the dominant, popular, or mainstream public memory of the Salem witch trials. One of the goals of my analysis is to shed some light on the power dynamics of American society through a more detailed understanding of our public memories.

PUBLIC MEMORY FLUCTUATES

Virtually any scholarly discussion of public memory uses words such as “crafted,” “contested,” or “constructed,” to talk about how these memories are created by groups. For example, Thelen writes that public memory “is constructed, not reproduced”²³ and Kammen argues that “memory is always selective and . . . often contested.”²⁴ Sicher even goes so far as to argue that “the past can be pliable and adaptable, fluid and opaque, polysemous and deconstructed.”²⁵ While some scholars have used this conclusion to problematize the study of public memory, others have contended that the process of crafting the public’s memory provides scholars with greater opportunities for analysis and research. Indeed, archeologist Yannis Hamilakis and linguist Jo Labanyi conclude that “the fact that the past is changed when it is remembered – both by institutions and by individuals – appears to be a weakness only if we conceive of memory as a repository. If, instead, we think of memory as a practice (work in the sense of reworking), the fact that it changes the past can be seen as its strength.”²⁶

Indeed, my analysis in this chapter relies on the claim that argumentation is essential to the construction of public memory. Communication scholar Roseann M. Mandziuk contends that the process of contesting a memory is vital because it can bring many elements of culture and worldview to light, for “the examination of . . . multiple layers of

discourse juxtaposes the various voices raised in each commemorative process to reveal the specific values at play in each instance of rendering [the subject] into public memory.”²⁷

The artifacts examined in my analysis were created over a period of sixty years, and as such, they represent different interpretations of the Salem crisis that were created by individuals living through a variety of different historical contexts. My examination will highlight the thematic diversity of these artifacts in an effort to understand the “values that are at play” in each contribution to our American public memory of the trials.

Many scholars have focused specifically on examining the public memory of the Holocaust, and their analysis of this topic often stresses the importance of re-examining the “official histories” of the past. In a 1994 article addressing this issue, literary theorist Geoffrey Hartman contends

that a war is always going on to modify memory, and we all wage it in ourselves first: who does not remember moments of altering (or rationalizing or shading) experiences painful to self-esteem? When waged publicly, however, such warfare leads to an institutionalized and bogus recollection, a churlish denial of the history of others (covering up, for instance, at Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, the Jewish identity of most of the victims), or an artificially inseminated perspective.²⁸

Thus, because public memory allows a culture to contest and recreate its past, examining these memories can be integral to discovering the many layers, dimensions, and voices of a group and allowing traditionally marginalized sub-groups to take an active role in the process of crafting their cultural identity and selecting how to appropriately remember the events of the past.

PUBLIC MEMORY TAKES MANY FORMS

Just as public memories are reconstructed over time, the ways in which these memories are displayed also vary. Indeed, Eyal argues that “there are many ways to remember, recall, recollect and memorialize”²⁹ and Wagner-Pacifici contends that “memories are never formless.”³⁰ In many of the scholarly works on public memory, authors have taken time to specifically note the great diversity of ways in which groups have recorded and displayed their memories. These lists include everything from “interviews and interrogations, public speeches, descriptions in books of fiction or nonfiction, publicly or privately performed ceremonies of commemoration and mourning, and the construction of memorials at public sites;”³¹ to “narratives, pictorial images, textbooks, pamphlets, legal charters, wills, diaries and statues;”³² and even “cooking and eating practices, house furnishings, schoolbooks, novels, [and] cartoon strips.”³³

But while each of these unique artifacts is an important component of the study of public memory, Zelizer reminds us that “no memory is embodied in any of these artifacts, but instead bounces to and fro among all of them, on its way to gaining meaning.”³⁴ Thus, the study of public memory requires a scholar to review a wide variety of texts that have contributed to the public’s memory of an event to accurately analyze how that memory was constructed and fully understand its complexity. In this chapter, I will examine how the public memory of the Salem witchcraft trials has developed through more than thirty distinct rhetorical artifacts from the genres of film, history texts, television, theater, literature, and comics.

Because public memories can be represented through a potentially infinite number of channels, several scholars have developed classification systems to group these forms into a smaller number of more comprehensive categories. Two of these organizational systems played a key role in helping me to narrow down and select the texts I will analyze in this chapter. The first comes from the work of communication scholar Kendall R. Phillips who helps to further tease out the forms of public memory by dividing the ways in which societies remember the past into two major groups: the memory of publics and the publicness of memory.³⁵ This chapter will focus specifically on texts that fall into the second category. Phillips writes that when thinking about the “publicness of memory,” we should “think of public memories as those that have been visible to many, [and] that have appeared in the view of others.”³⁶ Accordingly, each of the texts included in this chapter were chosen because they displayed the public memory of the Salem witchcraft crisis to a large audience through their popularity and accessibility.

The second categorization system is clearly articulated in Stephen H. Browne’s review essay for the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* in which he argues that public memory is often “created, sustained, and transformed” through the conflicting accounts of two cultures: the official and the vernacular.³⁷ In my review of the literature in the field of public memory, I observed that many scholars have chosen to limit the artifacts they analyze to those that fall into one of these two categories, while others have focused on analyzing the information that is located at the intersection of both official and vernacular texts.³⁸ For the purposes of this chapter, my primary focus will be on understanding vernacular texts,

because as Knapp argues, “my interest is in the reconstructive impulse itself or, more precisely, in the impulse to go behind the official memories recorded in canonical texts, religious or otherwise, to get at the social facts those ‘memories’ have allegedly suppressed or forgotten.”³⁹ Therefore, nearly all of the texts examined in this chapter were created by members of vernacular American culture, which Browne describes as “a culture that is sited locally; [and] is given material and symbolic expression by the individual and community.”⁴⁰

PUBLIC MEMORY IS OFTEN COMMUNICATED THROUGH THE NARRATIVE

To further narrow down the multitude of vernacular texts that have contributed to the public memory of the Salem witchcraft crisis, I am relying on the argument voiced by numerous scholars about the importance of pop culture as a medium for the transmission of public memory in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Zelizer voices this argument distinctly in her review essay when she writes

in between one’s head and the world, therefore, is a repertoire of different agents of mediation – media that help us to remember. As these media – invoked here in the broadest configuration and not just in reference to the mass media – have helped organize information at a point contemporaneous to the event, so too have they helped organize information at a point somewhat distant from the event. . . . Not surprisingly, the proliferation of popular cultural forms has been key here. From comics to popular films, popular culture has assumed an active presence in the shaping and reshaping of memory.⁴¹

In his analysis of contemporary American Holocaust narratives such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Schindler’s List*, Sicher also argues that rhetorical artifacts classified as examples of pop culture play an important role in shaping public memory. Indeed, he insists that “collective memory cannot be divorced from its construction in culture . . . plays, novels

and movies generate cultural perceptions in ways that are particularly problematic and that stimulate further media reworking of the memory, which may produce stronger images than documentary presentation of facts and testimony by witnesses, educators, and historians.”⁴²

To understand why popular culture is so pivotal to public memory, it is important to consider a key element of this category of texts – the narrative. By its very nature, reconstructing, reproducing, or recreating public memory is essentially a process of deciding the most effective and/or appropriate way to tell the story of the past. In the same way, individuals who create (direct, write, produce, etc.) texts that are identified as “pop culture” must consider the best way to tell a specific story to the public (their audience). Indeed, in their contribution to the inaugural issue of *History and Memory*, Gedi and Elam contend that the study of public memory is virtually always tied to the examination of a narrative because of the “methodological influence of both linguistic philosophy and literary criticism on history” which leads them to conclude that “collective memory is but a myth.”⁴³ Eyal agrees with this conclusion when he contends that public memory scholars “chose to rename and reinterpret as ‘memory’ what used to be called in the past ‘tradition,’ folklore’ or ‘myth.’”⁴⁴

Historian David Thelen connects the interdisciplinary study of memories as narratives specifically to communication scholarship in writing that

by reconnecting history with its origins in the narrative form of everyday communication, attention to memory transcends specialization by speaking the language of face-to-face association and firsthand experience. . . . Storyteller and audience are partners in creating the memory to be told. In the course of everyday talk narrators fix their listeners very clearly in mind as

they decide which elements to recollect, how to organize and interpret those elements, and how to make the memory public.⁴⁵

This idea, that a significant degree of information can be gained through examining memories as communication, has framed the analysis section of this chapter, in which I examine contemporary pop culture narratives of the events and themes from the Salem witchcraft crisis as rhetorical texts. By defining these artifacts as “rhetorical” in nature, I mean to argue that each text (whether it be a novel, television episode, movie, comic book, or play) was crafted by a rhetor with a particular audience in mind. I will argue that in each case, the rhetor chose to highlight aspects of our public memory surrounding the events at Salem for a specific purpose; that the decision to make such a connection between the past and the present was not arbitrary. Thus, my examination of public memory relies on Sicher’s argument that “it is in narrative that memory is inscribed.”⁴⁶

PUBLIC MEMORY IS UNIQUELY TIED TO PHYSICAL SPACES

This connection between public memory and narrative provides a rationale for the importance of “space” in memory studies. Just as the setting is critical to a narrative, the location associated with a historical event often plays a central role in the public memory of that event. Numerous scholars have noted that this connection can be traced back to ancient Greece. Specifically, Davis and Starn remind their readers that “Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of memory, was also the mother of history,”⁴⁷ and Hartman highlights the fact that “the Greeks made Mnemosyne the mother of the Muses.”⁴⁸ Of course, the study of rhetoric in both ancient Greece and Rome also emphasized the importance of memory.⁴⁹ As Kennedy notes,

mnemonics has a history that apparently began in the fifth century B.C.E. Throughout the centuries the subject was explored in a series of separate treatises, as well as being given some treatment in rhetorical handbooks. Most of the account [in the *Rhetoric for Herennius*] is given over to the “artificial” system of backgrounds and images that a student can use to memorize any kind of discourse. A background is a physical setting, familiar to the student, and can be thought of as a tablet in the mind. Against this background the student imagines pictures that symbolize the ideas or the words of a speech in the order in which they should occur. When the student is speaking, this picture is then passed in review in the mind to suggest the thoughts or words.⁵⁰

Indeed, Cicero believed that the study of memory was so vital to the practice of public speaking that he classified it as one of his five canons of rhetoric in his *De Inventione*.⁵¹

In keeping with this ancient tradition of memory studies, several contemporary scholars have pointed out the uniquely important role that space often plays in modern public memories. Indeed, Zelizer contends that public memory is anchored to the concept of space by “monuments, artifacts, even texts, which themselves bear a definitive relationship to space. From a house to a neighborhood to a nation, space has always helped define the boundaries of memory.”⁵² Similarly, Nora argues that “memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things.”⁵³ With these arguments about the integral relationship between public memory and space in mind, my analysis of contemporary representations of the events surrounding the Salem witchcraft trials will place particular emphasis on the recurring setting of Salem, Massachusetts, to discover what role the element of scene plays in our collective memory of this event.

PUBLIC MEMORY INFORMS THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

Sicher argues that “no nation can have a future without acknowledgment of its origins and development or without some understanding of its past.”⁵⁴ Even a brief review of public memory scholarship highlights the staggering amount of work that has been done on remembering the Holocaust.⁵⁵ Indeed, there has likely been more research and analysis conducted on the public memory of this one event than on any other single topic. However, this significant body of work is clearly justified by the magnitude of what took place – easily the most widespread and devastating example of racism, hatred, genocide, and calculated evil that was perpetrated on a national or international scale during the lifetime of most individuals living today. Numerous public memory scholars have argued that studying the ways in which groups remember the Holocaust is essential because of the traumatizing nature of the event itself. Indeed, as Mühlhahn argues, “through recorded memories we can discuss the long-term impact of trauma on individuals as well as their communities. Though traumatic events may be things of the past, the experience of those events continues in the present.”⁵⁶

Sociologist Neil J. Smelser defines cultural trauma as “a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation that is a) laden with negative affect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society’s existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions.”⁵⁷ Although Salem’s witchcraft crisis might appear insignificant when compared with the horrifying magnitude of the Holocaust, it is clear that the witch trials

held in this small New England community over three hundred years ago do fulfill Smelser's three criteria of culturally traumatic events: accusing and executing individuals for the crime of witchcraft certainly generated significant negative emotions, lives were taken that could not be restored, and the community's justice system was overrun by fear and suspicion.

Thus, an important aspect of the conclusions I will draw from my analysis in the second half of this chapter will center around a discussion of how rhetors have attempted to deal with the trauma of the Salem witch trials through contemporary public memory of the event. Of course, the artifacts discussed in this chapter are removed from their historical referent by several centuries, and all of the participants, victims, and survivors have long since died. However, as sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander contends, the routinization of trauma that comes with the passage of time does not render public memories powerless. Indeed, he writes that

once the collective identity has been so reconstructed, there will eventually emerge a period of "calming down." . . . As the heightened and powerfully affecting discourse of trauma disappears, the "lessons" of trauma become objectified in monuments, museums, and collections of historical artifacts. . . . No longer deeply preoccupying, the reconstructed collective identity remains, nevertheless, a fundamental resource for resolving future social problems and disturbances of collective consciousness. The inevitability of such routinization processes by no means neutralizes the extraordinary social significance of cultural traumas. The creation and routinization have, to the contrary, the most profound normative implications for the conduct of social life. By allowing members of wider publics to participate in the pain of others, cultural traumas broaden the realm of social understanding and sympathy, and they provide powerful avenues for new forms of social incorporation.⁵⁸

Alexander's argument that the public memory of trauma is important to communities for years after the traumatic event is key to my analysis of the contemporary public memory of

the Salem trials. Indeed, as Mühlhahn contends, culturally traumatic events “do not just afflict individuals; they affect whole communities and even nations. Many communities stricken by large traumas feel an obligation to combat forgetting and properly commemorate those who have disappeared.”⁵⁹ With this conclusion in mind, my own analysis will seek to discover how twentieth and twenty-first century public memories aid Americans in dealing with the traumatic events of centuries past in such a way that “memory, by overcoming trauma, [might] . . . cure society and protect it from itself, from its tendency to repeat abnormal and dangerous patterns of behavior.”⁶⁰

Of course, George Satayana’s argument that “those who cannot remember the past, are condemned to repeat it,” is always present in the background of public memory studies.⁶¹ Scholars in this field take both the fear of forgetting the past and the educational power of public memory very seriously.⁶² Indeed, a substantial amount (if not most) scholarship on public memory includes some form of the argument that through studying the past, societies can learn important lessons that will benefit both the present and the future.⁶³ Southgate articulates this argument in the following manner:

For the past – or rather our memories of the past – is to be examined, not simply *per se* or “for its own sake,” but in the light of our hopes for the future. Our revised narratives may, then, for example (if we so determine), prove to be less simplistic and more tolerant of unresolved complexities; and as such, they may enable the living of new and fuller lives, in what may then seem a more healthy, honest and open relationship with the past.⁶⁴

Similarly, Bodnar argues that this educational function of the scholarship about memory is essential because “public memory is produced from a political discussion that involves not so much specific economic or moral problems but rather fundamental issues about the

entire existence of a society: its organization, structure of power, and the very meaning of its past and present.”⁶⁵ Thus, my analysis will follow Schudson’s call for memory studies to “try to understand not only how people may use the past but how the past confines the uses to which people may intentionally put it” to understand the ways in which public memories of the events at Salem have been utilized by rhetors who seek to help modern Americans grapple with and understand current events.⁶⁶

Even such a brief review of these seven major conclusions about public memory highlights the depth and diversity of this interdisciplinary field of scholarship. With each of these claims about the nature and use of public memories in mind, the second portion of this chapter will examine the various ways in which rhetoricians throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have used the public memory of the Salem witchcraft trials to develop rhetorical artifacts “about the past [to] help [American] society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future.”⁶⁷

Remembering Salem Through Contemporary Popular Culture

In his *Mystic Cords of Memory*, Kammen argues “that the past may be mobilized to serve partisan purposes.”⁶⁸ This claim highlights a key similarity between the rhetorical goal of crafting messages that “direct the attention” of an audience, and the ways in which rhetors can “mobilize” public memories as rhetorical tools to aid them in achieving a specific purpose. Indeed, Michael Schudson writes that,

the past is not only the stories people tell of it; it is the claim of events that set the conditions about which people feel compelled to tell stories. It

follows that collective memory is not simply what happens when people intentionally and actively commemorate or re-tell the past. It is also what residues the past leaves with us and in us, residues that construct and confine how we understand the world and how past and present govern our perceptions and actions.⁶⁹

Thus, my analysis will contend that public memories can be employed as a filter, or what Burke called a “terministic screen,” through which rhetors use stories from the past to “govern the perceptions and actions” of audiences in the present.⁷⁰ Zelizer argues that by looking at public memory from this perspective, scholars gain “much more than the unidimensional study of the past,” and that in examining this function of public memory, critics are able to see “a graphing of the past as it is used for present aims, a vision in bold relief of the past as it is woven into the present and future.”⁷¹

THE “OFFICIAL” MEMORY OF THE SALEM WITCHCRAFT CRISIS

In 1692, several girls and young women in Salem, Massachusetts, accused three townspeople of being witches. In the public uproar that followed, neighbors fearfully accused one another of dealing with the devil. As a result of the Salem witch trials, the Massachusetts authorities ordered twenty men and women to be executed. After a few months, however, the community regained its balance, and the trials and hangings came to an end.

*America: Pathways to the Present, Modern American History*⁷²

As I mentioned in the first half of this chapter, my analysis of the public memory of the Salem witchcraft crisis will be primarily focused on the ways in which popular culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has remembered these events through vernacular channels such as TV, film, literature, and comic books. However, in order to gain a more complete understanding of the source of these narratives and the ways in which they impact society, it is essential to note how these messages are both similar to and divergent from the

“official” memories of the Salem trials. Such official memories are also communicated through a variety of channels.

For example, the Massachusetts towns of Salem and Danvers (the modern day incorporation of Salem Village), have been transformed over the years and are now tourist hot-spots that attract individuals who are interested in learning about seventeenth century colonial America through a twenty-first century living history experience. Both communities maintain historical sites that preserve the legacy of the events that took place in 1692 and strive to educate new generations of Americans about the real facts behind the stories that have become such a vibrant and common element of contemporary public memory in this country. Roger Gatchet has written an excellent analysis of the rhetorical impact of these communities as both memorials and tourist attractions.⁷³ In this article, he argues that

despite recent attempts by city officials to “re-brand” Salem and shift focus away from its international reputation as the Witch City, the area’s notoriety as the geographic site of America’s most intense witch persecution remains the central draw for visitors to the region.⁷⁴

From museums, to a recreated village, walking tours, period homes, and even the official Salem Witchcraft Trials Memorial, these two cities are certainly an important source for the preservation and dissemination of the official memory of the witchcraft crisis.

Additionally, organizations such as the Public Broadcasting Service and The History Channel have produced documentary programs that attempt to educate the public on what historians and scholars have concluded took place at Salem three hundred years ago. In 1985, PBS American Playhouse produced, “Three Sovereigns for Sarah,” a miniseries which

touts “an accurate portrayal of the Salem witch trials, with real characters and original transcripts woven into the dialogue.”⁷⁵ This piece focused specifically on how the events at Salem impacted the three Towne sisters, and follows Sarah Cloyse’s “lifelong-efforts to vindicate the reputations of her two sisters.”⁷⁶ PBS followed this historical dramatization with their 2001 documentary-style production entitled, “Secrets of the Dead: Witches Curse.” This show explores some of the more *unique* possible explanations for the afflicted girls’ behavior, “from wrenching convulsions and vivid delirium to contaminated crops, hallucinogenic drugs, and an ancient bog man hacked to death.”⁷⁷ The History Channel has also produced a program about with witchcraft crisis. Their 2005 documentary, simply titled “Salem Witch Trials,” aims to “unravel the truth from the legends” about the witchcraft crisis.⁷⁸

Although these messages offer fairly accurate and generally interesting historical information about what took place at Salem, their audience is inherently limited to those individuals who choose to watch educational programming and/or have actually made the trip to New England to visit the site of the trials. Therefore, instead of focusing on these messages that reach a relatively small group of people, my investigation of the “official” public memory of the Salem witchcraft crisis will focus on texts crafted for a rhetorical platform that reaches a much larger percentage of Americans – the public education system. In order to gain some insight into what today’s children and young adults are learning about this aspect of their national history, I spent some time reviewing a variety of textbooks that have been adopted by the Texas Education Agency for use in eighth and eleventh grade

United States history courses. I identified four books written for each grade level that had at least some coverage of the Salem witchcraft crisis, and examined the information they included about the witch trials.

As I argued in my review of literature, historical accuracy is not always the most important element of public memories – whether they are official or vernacular. Indeed, the construction of public memories often provides an important channel for transmitting messages and voices that would otherwise be hidden in traditional historical accounts. But this flexibility begs an important question – is there a situation in which it is problematic for memories to blatantly contradict documented historical record? I would argue that there is not a simple “yes” or “no” response to this question, but that such determinations must be made on a case-by-case basis. After all, there is a vast difference between providing children with incorrect dates in a history class and changing the names of historical figures in a work of fiction in order to develop a plotline that makes an important rhetorical argument. In my own examination of these eight history texts, I concluded that the information young adults are being taught today about this period in history is problematic for three reasons: it is brief, consequently oversimplified, and partially inaccurate.

Information About Salem is Brief

Perhaps the most glaring problem I noticed as I began searching through these textbooks was that the coverage of the Salem crisis in the current history curricula is, first and foremost, extremely brief. Indeed, I found far more books that devoted a paragraph or less to this event than those that covered the crisis in any amount of detail. Perhaps

understandably, the texts that spent the most time discussing and explaining the witchcraft trials were those that were written for an older audience. As my project has illustrated thus far, this period in American history was not a simple event with an easy explanation. Based on the amount of space devoted to explaining what happened at Salem in the books I examined, it is clear this group of history scholars, textbook authors, teachers, and editors have concluded that such a discussion is simply easier to frame for young adults who are old enough to understand the nuances of such a complex situation. Of course the result of this mindset is that, until they reach high school, students today receive little to no information about the witchcraft crisis from their public education. When viewed from this perspective, it appears that these adults are essentially using an avoidance strategy to prevent themselves from having to explain something exceptionally challenging to children. Although this could be criticized as problematic in and of itself, electing to spend so little time on explaining the witch trials has created two larger problems that are now impacting generations of history students.

Information About Salem is Oversimplified

The first of these is that, in their quest to condense the descriptions of the Salem trials in their textbooks, the authors and editors of these texts virtually all elected to vastly simplify their accounts of the events that took place at Salem. Most often, this reduction occurred as they attempted to explain the root cause of the witchcraft crisis. The worst example of this occurred in Prentice Hall's eighth grade history text, *The American Nation: Beginnings Through 1877*, when Dr. James West Davidson reduced the story of the Salem

witchcraft crisis to a two sentence summary: “One crime punishable by death was witchcraft. In 1692, Puritans in Salem Village executed twenty men and women as witches.”⁷⁹ Although the other three eighth grade texts I examined did spend at least a paragraph discussing the trials, their explanations were also very simplistic. One text merely called the crisis a “community conflict,”⁸⁰ while another said that “societal changes . . . led to an atmosphere of fear and suspicion,”⁸¹ and the final book told students that the afflicted girls “broke under the strain” of the “burden of guilt” they carried for having asked Tituba to “tell their fortunes.”⁸²

Although they did a better job of representing what took place at Salem, most of the eleventh grade books I analyzed still did not fully explain the complex nature of the crisis to their older audience members. The most simplistic analysis merely suggested that “some historians believe that the witch trials reflected the colonists’ fears about political changes taking place at the time.”⁸³ Another text limited their comments to the gender-related explanation overviewed in the scholarly interlude that preceded this chapter, arguing that “the Salem witchcraft trials exposed the dark side of Puritan ideas about women.”⁸⁴ The third book actually spent two pages detailing some of the primary facts of the Salem crisis, but still focused mainly on one cause of the situation, concluding that “witches made it somewhat easier for New Englanders to consider themselves saints rather than sinners.”⁸⁵

While each of these arguments certainly has a place within the narrative of what occurred at Salem, one would have to read all three of these texts to gain a decent understanding of the influences that, in combination, could appropriately be identified as

the “cause” of the witchcraft crisis. Merely offering one facet of the overall explanation does not provide students with either an accurate description of historical facts or an appropriate appreciation for the complex nature of what took place at Salem in 1692. In fact, these examples of reduction make strong and dangerous claims about the singular power of politics, gender, and religion in Puritan America of the late seventeenth century.

Thus, considering the amount of space and attention their contemporaries devoted to this event, Divine, Breen, Fredrickson, and Williams should be commended for the depth of analysis they provided to high school students in their *America: Past and Present*. In their initial summary of the event, the authors argue that “religious discord,” “economic tensions,” “misogyny,” “terror of attack by Native Americans,” and “jealousy and bitterness” all contributed to the crisis.⁸⁶ But in addition to this two-page overview, they also devoted another four and a half pages to a discussion of the ways in which colonial Massachusetts’ legal system and use of spectral evidence complicated the organization and management of the witch trials.⁸⁷ These authors provided an excellent example of a way in which the nuances of the Salem crisis could be explained to young adults, and in doing so, they helped to combat the lack of information that most of today’s public school students are being given about this period in American history.

Information About Salem is Often Inaccurate

The third main problem with the “official” memory of the Salem trials, as it is communicated in today’s history classrooms, is the misinformation that is created when textbook authors and editors simplified and shortened the story of the crisis. In their quest

to save space and provide a simple cause and effect argument, many of these texts have actually presented inaccurate facts to their readers. For example, *Call to Freedom* informed students that “nineteen people [were] put to death,” leaving out Giles Corey, and that “many of the local officials and clergymen involved regretted their acts, [with] Judge Samuel Sewall [being] one of the first to apologize publicly,” although none of the other men ever made a public confession of guilt.⁸⁸ *America: Pathways to the Present* also presented inaccurate information about the nature of the victims in Salem, purporting that “Massachusetts authorities ordered twenty men and women to be executed.”⁸⁹ Although the number was correct in this text, they failed to highlight that only nineteen were sentenced to execution while Corey died while being tortured to confess. Even worse, *Creating America* claimed that the trials began after “several Salem village girls were told frightening stories about witches by Tituba,” effectively placing significant blame for the event on scary stories that there is no evidence to prove were ever told.⁹⁰

Thus, the messages that most Americans receive about the witchcraft crisis through official channels are inherently conflicting. The information that is typically disseminated either through mass media channels or within the public education system focuses on the most exciting, sensational, and generalized aspects of the events that took place in Salem rather than ensuring that contemporary Americans understand that what occurred was a complex situation initiated and sustained because of an array of factors from the influence of political concerns, economic constraints, religious beliefs, social structures, and legal systems. I could offer a number of possible explanations for why this occurs so often

through official public memory channels. For instance, it would be simple to reason that rhetors who write and edit textbooks have a difficult time explaining the cause of the witchcraft crisis because no one, not even current scholars, has been able to agree on a single explanation for the trials. I could also suggest that some rhetors choose to frame and organize their summary of the witchcraft crisis in a specific manner because sensational and entertaining stories are easier to package and sell in contemporary America. Additionally, I could contend that it is simply easier to make generalizations than to offer detailed analysis, or even that as time has passed, many of the historical minutiae of the Salem crisis have simply been forgotten. But whatever the reason for the growing historical inaccuracy and/or lack of specificity, these sparse and brief messages provide a key opportunity for rhetors constructing vernacular memory sources to enter the discussion about the Salem witchcraft crisis in a remarkably powerful and legitimate manner.

THE “VERNACULAR” MEMORY OF THE SALEM WITCHCRAFT CRISIS

TEACHER: Ah ha, we seem to have a skeptic in our midst. Mr. Dennison, would you care to share your California laid back, tie-dye point of view?

MAX: Ok. Granted that, ah, you guys here in Salem are all into these, ah, black cats and witches and stuff...

TEACHER: Stuff? [Class mumbles]

MAX: Fine. But everyone here knows that Halloween was invented by the candy companies. It's a conspiracy.

ALLISON: It just so happens that Halloween is based on the ancient feast called All Hallow's Eve. It's the one night of the year where the spirits of the dead can return to earth. [Class cheers]

Disney's *Hocus Pocus* ⁹¹

Popular culture texts about witchcraft such as The Walt Disney Corporation's 1993 hit movie *Hocus Pocus* have intrigued and entertained audiences for decades through mediums such as television, film, novels, and comics. As the epigraph above illustrates, each of the artifacts I will examine in this section are works of fiction, whose plotlines are all tied in one way or another to historical reality. Indeed, it is this connection to verifiable facts that makes many of these stories *just* believable enough to spark their listener, reader, or viewer's imagination without being entirely un-relatable.

In this section, I will examine over thirty-five different episodes, novels, films, etc. from the past sixty years that have made this tie to reality through references to the Salem witchcraft trials. In chronological order, these texts are: Arthur Miller's Broadway play *The Crucible* (1952), selected episodes from the television show *Bewitched* (1970), selected issues of *Marvel Team-Up* (1976), Disney's film *Hocus Pocus* (1993), a comedy sketch from *Saturday Night Live* (1993), the film adaptation of Miller's play *The Crucible* (1996), an episode of the television show *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1997), a Halloween episode of *The Simpsons* (1997), two selected episodes of the television show *Charmed* (1998 & 2000), one episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1999), J.K. Rowling's novel *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), an episode of *The West Wing* (2001), Sony Pictures' film *The Covenant* (2006), the first season of the television show *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2010), an episode of the reality television program *So You Think You Can Dance* (2009), and Katherine Howe's novel *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane* (2009).

Through analyzing these texts, I ultimately seek to understand how the contemporary public memory of the Salem witchcraft crisis has influenced facets of modern American identity and how it has been “mobilized” to aid individuals and groups in dealing with present challenges and in making decisions for their future. I have organized this analysis around two basic questions: *how* and *why* have these texts remembered the events that took place at Salem in the 1690s? After addressing these issues, I will conclude with a summary of the overall value and impact of the American public memory of the Salem witch trials.

How Have Contemporary Texts Remembered Salem?

In his discussion of fantasy themes that informed my analysis of the constitutive rhetoric preceding the witchcraft crisis, Bormann identifies three critical elements of a rhetorical vision: “who are the dramatis personae,” “where are the dramas set,” and “what are the typical scenarios?”⁹² He argues that further investigating these three issues can aid a rhetorical critic in understanding the vision as a whole. Thus, as I examine “how” the discourse that comprises the contemporary public memory of the Salem witchcraft crisis constructs larger themes, or as Bormann would term them “rhetorical visions,” I will specifically look at three unique facets of the characters, settings, and actions present in these pop culture artifacts. I argue that these elements are primarily addressed through descriptions of ancestry, the use of Salem, Massachusetts, as a setting, and the recurring theme of time travel.

Ancestry. One of the recurring themes used by the rhetors responsible for many of the popular culture works I examine in this chapter is their reliance on a narrative of ancestry to connect twentieth and twenty-first century characters to the crisis that took place in Salem over three hundred years ago. In the pilot episode of *The Vampire Diaries*, Bonnie introduced her family's connection to the events that took place at Salem through a story she told her best friend Elena as they drove to school. Although she did not fully accept her ancestry at this early point in the plot, Bonnie was clearly intrigued by several things that her grandmother had told her over summer vacation.

BONNIE: So, Grams is telling me I'm psychic. Our ancestors were from Salem, witches and all that. I know – crazy. But she's going on and on about it, and I'm like: "Put this woman in a home already." But then, I started thinking. I predicted Obama. And I predicted Heath Ledger. And I still think Florida will break off and turn into little resort islands.⁹³

As this quotation illustrates, the concept of lineage is often used in contemporary texts to connect characters living in cultures that would otherwise doubt the existence of supernatural occurrences to our memory of the historical events that took place at Salem.

While this excerpt provides a clear example of how rhetors have utilized the character element of rhetorical visions, the *Vampire Diaries* is far from the only text that relies on ancestry to connect their plot with their audience's memory of what happened in Salem. In the *Charmed* episode, "The Witch is Back," the Halliwell sisters met Melinda Warren, their great-great-great-great-grandmother who, as Piper declared, "burned at the stake and started this whole mess."⁹⁴ Viewers learned later in the same episode that Melinda was indeed a victim of Salem's witch hunt. Similarly, in, "Samantha's Bad Day in Salem,"

one of the eight episodes of *Bewitched's* seventh season that detailed the Stephens' trip to Salem, Massachusetts, audience members learned that Samantha's mother Endora had actually been a Salem resident in 1692.⁹⁵ The four "Sons of Ipswich" in *The Covenant* had to deal with the opportunities and challenges associated with their supernatural powers, which had been passed down from father to son for generations. As the story developed, audience members learned that these powers had been kept secret since the boys' ancestors made a covenant of silence to protect themselves during the 1692 witchcraft crisis.⁹⁶ And finally, in *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane*, Connie discovered her ancestral connection to the Salem trials while sorting through items in her grandmother's house.⁹⁷

Setting. Dusty roads, black and white clothing, a church, someone in the stocks, farms dotting the landscape, men on horseback, women hanging the laundry. This simple description is a fairly accurate summary of the way in which nearly every popular culture text set in colonial Salem has visually described this late seventeenth century community.⁹⁸ In many ways, this is an accurate assessment of the values and activities that were most important to this strict culture. Texts from the period, such as those analyzed in Chapter II, illustrate that community leaders attempted to ensure that hard work, piety, and religious devotion were the core values held by Puritans living in the colony of Massachusetts during the period of the witchcraft trials, and these values were not only reflected in their actions, but also in the physical organization and makeup of Salem Village itself.

In order to maintain their devotion to God, and achieve the goals set for their community by religious and political leaders, colonial Puritans living during 1692 placed a

high premium on practicality. And this quality was reflected visually and architecturally throughout Salem Village and other similar New England towns during this period. The focal points of town were the two communal buildings that reflected these same values – the church and the jail. Colonials went to church to learn about God – about the ways in which he had worked on earth and about the manner in which he wanted his children, in this case the Puritans, to live. Because the connections between religious belief and political leadership were so strong in Salem and other New England communities during this period, Biblical commands were often transformed into penal codes through the legal system. Thus, when individuals broke God's commandments, the political system in New England also argued that they were breaking earthly regulations. In this way, when colonials did not heed the messages they heard in the meetinghouse, they were often punished for both their spiritual and earthly disobedience by a period of forced confinement in the second major town structure – the jail.

Other than the physical layout of their communities, the detail of late seventeenth century Massachusetts that is most often depicted visually in references to this specific time period is the attire of their Puritan inhabitants. In fact, the image of women and men dressed in modest, drab colored clothing that literally covered their bodies from head to toe is an integral aspect of the visual characterization of the individuals who were involved in the witchcraft crisis. Clearly, the value of practicality extended past the town layout and into the Puritan home. Clothes, just as building design and all forms of decoration or ornamentation, were governed by this same guiding principle. Garments needed to serve

only two purposes: to protect their wearer from the elements, and to help individuals remain modest in public.

This pervasive system of morality created a distinctive setting that has figured prominently in our contemporary public memory of the Salem trials. It is a unique visual symbol, often rooted firmly in the minds of children through the use of stereotypes that are communicated as early as elementary school when they participate in recreations of the first American Thanksgiving dinner. And, after this image has been repeated countless times through television, film, literature, and even United States history courses, the visual representation of this community and its people quickly begins to evoke powerful memories and emotions within the minds of Americans. Thus, it is no surprise that such an extensive number of modern popular culture artifacts have chosen to not only refer to the events that took place at Salem, but also to use this community as a setting for all or part of their stories.

Both of the television shows, *Bewitched* and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, elected to use Salem, Massachusetts as a setting for a small portion of their overall artifact.⁹⁹ In each case, the main character – a female witch who was trying to live and maintain relationships in the mortal world – made a trip to present day Salem. But, through two unique series of events, these women found themselves in a Puritan courtroom, facing charges of witchcraft. Although the plotlines for each show were different, the visual imagery was almost entirely the same. Both characters ended up standing before a judge wearing traditional Puritan

clothing in a stark room filled with their peers who were sitting on hard benches, ready and even eager to bring witchcraft charges against members of their community.

Comedy and satire programs have also capitalized on the setting of seventeenth century Salem to underscore both their punch lines and their arguments about societal behavior. The writers of *Saturday Night Live*, created a sketch titled “The Salem Bitch Trials,” which aired during the show’s October 2, 1993 episode.¹⁰⁰ In this portion of the broadcast, Shannen Doherty, one of the stars of the television show *Charmed*, played the role of Abigail Wolcott – a woman “accused of practicing the infernal art of Bitchcraft.”¹⁰¹ Her trial was set in what contemporary Americans have come to recognize as a typical Puritan courtroom, and the following excerpt details the general nature of the accusations that members of the Salem community brought against her.

GOODWIFE MERKAN: Ohh . . . but I know her ways. I have seen them with mine own eyes!

DEPUTY GOVERNOR DANFORTH: Then, speak, Good Lady.

GOODWIFE MERKAN: One fortnight past, I saw Abigail flying on her broom!

DANFORTH: And?

GOODWIFE MERKAN: And . . . uh . . . I caught her in the forest summoning the Devil!

DANFORTH: Annnd?

GOODWIFE MERKAN: And? And, uh . . . the other day, I met her on the road with the Devil, and she didn't even introduce me.

SAMUEL: The bitch did the same thing to me!!

CROWD: [screaming] Burn her!! Burn her!!¹⁰²

Although the writers were clearly attempting to mock the events that unfolded in Salem Village during 1692, they concluded this sketch with the following exchange that made an

important argument about the role of women in both seventeenth and twentieth century America.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR DANFORTH: [pounding gavel] Silence. Abigail Wolcott [she sighs], have you anything else to say in your defense?

ABIGAIL: Yes, your Honor. I deny partaking in any acts of bitchery. 'Tis an outrage lie. I merely speak the truth. Why is it when a man speaketh his mind, he's admired and made judge. But when a woman displays forthrightness, she's accused of being a bitch. I pray you, Sir: release me, and end this mindless persecution of women.

DANFORTH: [thinking, sighs] I have heard your speech, Abigail. Your eloquent plea doth not fall upon deaf ears. [stern at first, then angry] However, your words would sway greatly more had they not been delivered in such a bitchy manner! You shall be burned!!¹⁰³

Thus, with the visual backdrop of Salem Village as the setting for this fictional trial, *Saturday Night Live* constructed an interesting argument about both the actual witch trials and the ways in which women still face similar forms of persecution in modern America. By tying this plot to the events of the Salem crisis implicitly through setting, they were able to construct a powerful enthymeme – effectively insinuating that some aspects of gender relations have changed very little in the three hundred years since the witch trials.

The two films *The Covenant* and *Hocus Pocus* are both set in present-day Salem.¹⁰⁴

Each movie introduces their audience to characters living in typical contemporary communities, but as their plots develop, these twentieth century Americans find themselves dealing with the powerful remnants of seventeenth century witchcraft that none of them had ever thought *really* existed. In *The Covenant*, four of the Sons of Ipswich faced both human and supernatural obstacles as they fought to keep their powers away from the forces of evil.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, in *Hocus Pocus*, a disbelieving teenager fulfilled a prophecy made by a

seventeenth century witch while awaiting her execution, and consequently brought three witches back from the dead. The teenager, Max Dennison, his sister, and a friend, then had to protect their town by finding a way to destroy the witches forever.¹⁰⁶ Although neither of these artifacts included a reenactment of the trials, they each illustrated the power that the community of Salem still holds three hundred years after the conclusion of the crisis as the physical epicenter of belief and memory about witchcraft and witch hunts in America.

Indeed, in the fourth book of J.K. Rowling's popular *Harry Potter* series, the author sent her main characters to the Quidditch World Cup, the international playoff tournament for the popular wizarding sport. When Harry and his friends arrived, they found themselves in the midst of a huge gathering of witches and wizards from around the world. As they walked through the campground that was littered with flags from countries around the world and emblems supporting the two teams who had advanced to the final round of the tournament, Rowling wrote that Harry saw "a group of middle-aged American witches [who] sat gossiping happily beneath a spangled banner stretched between their tents which read: *The Salem Witches' Institute*."¹⁰⁷ Although Harry and his friends never actually travelled to the United States, and no further reference to these, or any other, American witches was made in the series, it is interesting to note that within contemporary popular culture artifacts which are generally considered to be "mainstream" in America, Salem has truly become *the* physical site of memory for references to witchcraft, stories of witch hunts, and the historical events that took place over three hundred years ago.

Time Travel. Other rhetors have elected to use the action theme of time travel to tie the plotlines of their artifacts to the Salem crisis. Although this concept might appear out of place in some contexts, allowing individuals to move forward and backward through time seems almost fitting in these fictional works, since they each deal with the topics of magic and/or witchcraft in one way or another. In the five issues of *Marvel Team-Up* that were released from January through May of 1976, Spider-Man travelled back in time to fight Cotton Mather in an attempt to prevent the executions that took place at Salem in 1692.¹⁰⁸ Conversely, rather than a present-day hero going back in time to fight evil, Disney's *Hocus Pocus* detailed the exact opposite scenario. In this film, three evil witches from the seventeenth century travelled forward in time to regain their power and youth through taking the lives of innocent children.¹⁰⁹

The writers of the two television shows that were based on the lives of contemporary witches who were tied to Salem through ancestry (*Bewitched* and *Charmed*) further explained this connection by sending their characters both backward *and* forward in time. As I mentioned earlier, in the "Salem Saga" episodes of *Bewitched*'s seventh season, audience members learned that Endora was actually alive during the witchcraft trials.¹¹⁰ Thus, by establishing the fact that witches had an extended life span in their fictional world, the show's writers essentially provided their twentieth century characters with an individual who was present to witness, first-hand, what took place at Salem. They further strengthened this connection by sending Samantha and Darrin back to the seventeenth century during the final episode of the "Saga."¹¹¹ *Charmed*'s writers also used an ancestral link to provide a

rationale for time travel. They brought the Halliwell sisters' great-great-great-great-grandmother, Melinda Warren, who died in the Salem crisis, to the twentieth century to save the main characters' lives in season one, and then sent these three girls back in time during the third season to save Melinda's life.¹¹²

In each of these cases, the characters involved in the time travel storylines learned an important lesson from their dealings with individuals from another time period. In some cases, the lessons were specific, such as when the Halliwell sisters learned how to rely on the natural world around them to strengthen their magical powers. And in other cases, the lessons were more general, such as when Endora informed Darrin that prejudice, and not witchcraft, was the root cause of the 1692 trials. But in each instance, the ultimate lesson that both the characters, and in turn the audience members learned, was that you cannot change human nature. No matter what actions they took, no one – not even Spider Man – was able to use his or her ability to travel through time to successfully prevent the witchcraft crisis from taking place. And in the end, audiences were left with the message that human distrust toward and suspicion about one another has, unfortunately, been one of the most powerful forces throughout history.

Why Has Contemporary Public Memory Remembered Salem?

As I mentioned in the introduction to this analysis section, perhaps the most important questions to consider when examining the pop culture references to the Salem trials in contemporary America deal with the issue of why. Why is it that the creators of so many different artifacts have all chosen to appeal to their audience's public memory of

colonial Salem; why has virtually every television show, movie, or novel about modern witches made at least a passing reference to the trials; and why do these references seem to be so effective and so powerful in so many different contexts? It is in answering these questions about the “why” of the contemporary vernacular public memory of the Salem crisis that my examination will begin to reach some conclusions about the role that these memories play in America today. This section of my analysis will focus on three themes that directly address the issue of why – that public memory of the trials has been used in pop culture over the past sixty years to remember the woman as witch, to offer an explanation for the witchcraft crisis, and to develop the theme of the witch hunt.

Remembering the Woman as Witch. In Chapter I, I argued that the term “witch” inherently carries with it a significant amount of emotional baggage, much of which is related to the female stereotypes that are often associated with the practice of witchcraft. Perhaps this should not come as a surprise when we consider that historian Daniel Ogden has determined that the reference to the witch Circe in Homer’s *Odyssey*, written around 700 B.C.E. was the first depiction of a witch anywhere in Western history or literature.¹¹³ But British historian Ronald Hutton argues that the amount of time that has passed since the first documented instance of a female witch is not the only reason why Western civilization has nearly always associated witchery with women. In his review of Ogden’s book, Hutton points out that scholars had to comb through two hundred years of history after Circe’s appearance in the *Odyssey* (500 B.C.E.) to locate the first reference to a male witch, wizard, or sorcerer in the West. He uses this chronological information to support

his contention that “men are believed to learn magic from a learned and external tradition, whereas women simply embody and wield it naturally.”¹¹⁴

At several points throughout the texts that have constructed American contemporary public memory of Salem’s witchcraft crisis, rhetors have relied on a narrative association with this specific historical event to make a more general point about the “woman” as “witch.” And, in appropriate fashion for a persona that has been developing and changing for well over 2,500 years, there are quite a variety of gendered stereotypes created through our public memory of the trials. A complete discussion of the identity of the woman as witch in modern Western society has formed the basis for numerous other projects, and I do not have space here to fully address the intricacies of this topic. However, it is interesting to note that within the artifacts examined in this study, rhetors have generally developed the image of the female witches in their stories in one of two ways – either traditionally, or satirically.

Rhetors who adopt the “traditional” image of the female witch typically embrace the legacy of the powerful, wise, white witches that can be traced to early pagan cultures, such as that of the Celtic society that was discussed in my introductory chapter. These artifacts typically present the identity of female witches as powerful individuals who can and should use their abilities to benefit society. However, before explaining and promoting this positive connotation, virtually all of the rhetors who created these texts felt the need to address, criticize, and reject the humorous and/or negative personas that are generally referenced when contemporary Americans think about witches.

For example, in the episode of *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* mentioned in the first portion of my analysis, Sabrina found herself on trial for witchcraft during her class field trip to historic Salem. But rather than denying the charge, she elected to embrace her real identity as a witch in an attempt to change her peers' frame of reference about what it meant to be a witch.

HARVEY: Wait! What are you saying? You're not a witch. That was a false confession.

SABRINA: Harvey, I have no problem saying I'm a witch.

HARVEY: But I know it's not true. I mean, look at this face. Is this the face of a witch? No. Witches are horrible ugly things, and they melt when you throw water on 'em. Look. [He throws a glass of water in Sabrina's face.] See, she's still living.

SABRINA: Thanks, Harvey. But what you just described is a stereotype. I mean, how do you know witches are ugly? Have you ever seen one?

HARVEY: No.

SABRINA: Well maybe you fear witches because you've never met any. Yes, witches are different from mortals, but different isn't bad. I mean, maybe there are witches among us right now, but we're so close-minded they can't tell us who they are. And we're the ones missing out.¹¹⁵

In a similar fashion, during "The Salem Saga" episode of *Bewitched*, Samantha and her mother arrived in Salem, Massachusetts and almost immediately took steps to change the stereotypical visual representation of witches that they found posted throughout the town.

ENDORA: Look! [She points to a sign for the "Salem Historic Trail" that features the image of an old women with a crooked nose riding a broom.]

SAMANTHA: That's disgraceful!

DARRIN: They're all over town. They're just for the tourists.

ENDORA: Not for these tourists, and they're no longer all over town.

[Endora waves her hand, and the image on the sign transforms into that of a young blonde woman who looks like Samantha riding on a broom.]

SAMANTHA: Oh mother!

DARRIN: Did she have to do that?

SAMANTHA: Now sweetheart, witches have feelings too. How would you like to be thought of as an ugly old crone? It's a misconception.¹¹⁶

In addition to this argument that the visual image of a real witch varies drastically from the Halloween or Hollywood stereotype that most modern Americans cling to, the artifacts I examined also focused on the idea that the practice of witchcraft was far more serious than merely reciting magic words or using special powers to play tricks on people. In the sixth episode of the *Vampire Diaries*' first season, Bonnie finally accepted that she was a witch, and turned to her grandmother to learn more about her ancestry and what witchcraft truly was. But, much to her disappointment, her first lesson was not to memorize spells or incantations, but to fully appreciate the gravity of her heritage and its incumbent responsibilities.

BONNIE: Grams, everybody knows you're a witch.

GRAMS: They also know it's absurd. It can't be true. I'm just a kooky lady that teaches occult at the university. No one really believes. They just poke fun. And I let 'em. Don't let 'em know the truth.

BONNIE: Where's the witchcraft? You've been talking history for two days. I wanna get to the fun part.

GRAMS: It's not meant to be fun. It's real, and it's serious. And you must understand it before you practice it.¹¹⁷

Perhaps the most popular example of a contemporary artifact that fully embraces this "traditional" personification of the witch is *Charmed*. During the series' pilot episode, the main characters, Prue, Piper, and Phoebe Halliwell, discovered that they were "the charmed ones," the most powerful good witches who had ever lived. As such, they came to

understand that they would need to learn how to use witchcraft to combat and destroy the forces of evil on earth. In “All Halliwell’s Eve,” the sisters travelled back in time to colonial America, and learned how to enhance their abilities by relying on the powers around them in the natural world. Thus, through this ancestral connection to Salem, the rhetors who created *Charmed* argued that the female witches who were discovered in Salem (however many of those accused and/or executed actually were witches) were not in confederacy with Satan, but instead strong women who followed in a long line of individuals who relied on their unique powers to make a positive difference in the world around them.

Although it might be the most well-known, *Charmed* is not the only example of a recent popular artifact whose rhetor embraced this tradition by developing powerful main characters. Katherine Howe’s 2009 novel, *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane*, recounted the story of Connie, a doctoral student in colonial history at Harvard University in the early 1990s. During the summer after passing her oral qualifying exams, Connie’s mother sent her to clean out her late grandmother’s house in the Massachusetts countryside, near Salem. As her summer progressed, Connie spent a significant amount of time searching for the primary source she needed for her dissertation project, but this journey forced her to expand her beliefs beyond the limits of her traditional academic mindset, ultimately discovering that she was a direct descendant of Deliverance Dane, a previously undiscovered witch who died in the 1692 crisis. When Connie finally made this connection, Howe wrote the following passage about the legacy of witchcraft that was handed down to Connie by her female ancestors:

Mercy. Prudence. Patience. Temperance, whose placid mid-nineteenth-century face watched her from the portrait in Granna's dining room, a silent link connecting the line of women in her present life with the line of women she was chasing in the past. . . . She reviewed the details of her mother's life, clearing away the opaque clutter of New Age terminology, watching the truth change its contours under the shifting parameters of language. Just as all these women – each locked in her own moment in history, and yet somehow also a variation on Connie herself – described the craft in terms specific to their time.¹¹⁸

Ultimately, it was Connie's choice to embrace the power and abilities that have been handed down through generations of women in her family that enabled her to save the man she loved from an untimely death and achieve success in her own academic career.

In stark contrast to this strong image of the woman as witch, several of the artifacts analyzed in this chapter have used the pejorative connotation of the female witch as a “bitch” to interject humor into their storylines. In doing so, the rhetors responsible for creating these texts relied on each of the negative stereotypes that artifacts such as *Charmed*, *Bewitched*, *Vampire Diaries*, and *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane* had tried to erase, and reinforced them in order to make audience members laugh. One of the most detailed examples of this personification of female witches occurred during a *Saturday Night Live* sketch that aired on October 2, 1993 entitled the “Salem Bitch Trials.” The plot included some characters and action themes from the actual trials, but changed the crime under investigation from witchcraft to “bitchery.” The following exchange illustrates how this artifact defined this crime.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR DANFORTH: [pounding gavel] Order!! Who else speaketh against this woman?

COURT CLERK: Mary Putnam. Stand fore! [Mary stands fore]

MARY PUTNAM: Your Honor, Abigail Wolcott . . . belittled my frock.

DANFORTH: [stern] In what way, Mary?

MARY: She said my apron maketh my hips look big. [The crowd is stunned.]

DANFORTH: Abigail. What say you?

ABIGAIL: Is it not true? Look! Mary's hips are wider than the meeting house doors. Not to mention, she also has syphilis.

GOODWIFE MERKAN: Oh, she is a stuck-up bitch!

CROWD: [screaming] Burn her!!¹¹⁹

Although most of the other references to this theme were far less blatant than those made in this sketch, other rhetors have been able to make a similar point by merely using the word “witch,” when they wanted the audience watching and listening to hear the word “bitch.” For example, in *The Simpsons* 1997 Halloween episode that included a brief parody of the Salem trials, Bart made the statement, “well, son of a witch,” after seeing his mother fly across the sky on a broom.¹²⁰ The show's writers realized that by relying on the combination of American public memory of what happened at Salem and common colloquial phrases, the audience would easily, and likely thoughtlessly, switch the two words mentally as they listened to Bart's passing comment.

Interestingly enough, this word association is also effective within artifacts whose plotlines have nothing to do with witchcraft. On September 23, 2009, the Boston auditions for the sixth season of the reality television show, *So You Think You Can Dance*, aired on Fox. The following exchange between the show's three judges occurred as these individuals were deciding the fate of one of the hundreds of hopefuls who had come to audition for the show.

TYCE: You have a good personality, but you've got to really work hard for this. You know?

NIGEL: Tyce, yes or no to choreography?

TYCE: I'm gonna say no.

NIGEL: I say yes, I would like to see you go through, because anyone as entertaining as you deserves to move on. It's now down to Mary Murphy who feels very comfortable here in New England because this is where her ancestors were - in Salem.¹²¹

This spontaneous, and otherwise out-of-context reference to the American public memory of Salem's crisis immediately drew laughter from the other individuals sitting in the theater with the judges. However, it was clear from Nigel's teasing expression and the mock offense on Mary's face that he was not relying on any of the positive connotations associated with witchcraft, but instead, using the identity of the witch as an insult.

Clearly, Western society has changed in numerous ways since Circe made her appearance in Homer's *Odyssey*. However, as the saying goes, while some things have changed, many things have also remained the same. Despite the best efforts of the rhetors responsible for creating artifacts such as *Bewitched*, *Charmed*, *Vampire Diaries*, and *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane* to develop characters whose persona can be traced back to the historical representation of a witch as a powerful, wise woman who relies on natural sources of power to benefit others, it seems that the creators of texts such as *The Simpsons* and *Saturday Night Live* will always be working to use an opposing caricature of the witch to degrade and belittle both the practice of witchcraft, and often women in general. And surprisingly, as the success of all five of these pop culture artifacts can attest, our public memory of the Salem witchcraft crisis and our contemporary ideas about the practice of

witchcraft seem to be *just* malleable enough to support both of these conflicting interpretations of the woman as witch.

Remembering to Offer an Explanation. As this project has noted, countless historians, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, doctors, theologians, and political theorists have offered explanations for the Salem witchcraft crisis over the past three hundred years. And, in this tradition, the individuals responsible for crafting American public memory of the trials through popular culture artifacts created during the last sixty years have also contributed to the quest for understanding what really occurred in Salem during 1692. Although some of their explanations have fallen directly in line with those posited by academic scholarship in this area, the individuals working with vernacular texts have also had the unique opportunity to use the fictional nature of their rhetoric as a justification for creating storylines that depart from historical facts to consider what might have caused the witchcraft crisis in different, and sometimes humorous ways.

One of the more creative of these explanations occurs in texts whose plot argues that there were actual witches who were tried and/or killed during the Salem crisis. Each of these artifacts provides audience members with unique justifications for why actual witches would have allowed themselves to be captured and killed by mortals. These fictional accounts range from the witches' selfish desires, to their concern for their posterity, and even their devotion to greater societal values. A closer look at the plots that led to these rationalizations reveals that the vernacular public memory of the witchcraft trials runs from viewing them as a comedy to memorializing them as a tragedy.

In *Hocus Pocus*, the townspeople of Salem caught the three Sanderson sisters performing witchcraft in their home, and took the women to be hung for their crimes. As she stood on the platform, minutes away from her death, Winifred Sanderson, the oldest of the sisters, performed a spell that would bring her and her sisters back from the grave at some point in the future. Moments later, just before she was hung, Winifred made the following promise to the crowd assembled to witness her death:

WINIFRED: Fools! All of you! My ungodly book speaks to you. On All Hallow's Eve, when the moon is round, a virgin will summon us from under the ground. We shall be back, and the lives of all the children shall be mine!¹²²

This comedic treatment of the Salem crisis introduced the idea that if real witches had been caught and killed in 1692, they might have allowed such events to unfold as part of a larger plan that would eventually serve their own interests. Although there are very few similarities between the plot of *Hocus Pocus* and the actual trials, Winifred's reference to an "ungodly" book that aided witches in harming the children of Salem is surprisingly not that far from the reality of what many colonial Puritans believed during the height of the crisis.

The writers of *Charmed* approached their explanation of what took place in Salem from a much more realistic and believable perspective. As I mentioned earlier, the three Halliwell sisters were introduced as the decedents of Melinda Warren, a "good" witch who was killed during the 1692 crisis. In "The Witch is Back," Prue, Piper, and Phoebe used their powers to bring Melinda into the twentieth century to help them fight a powerful warlock. At one point, they asked her why she refrained from using her powers to save her

life. Melinda informed them that after she was accused and convicted of practicing witchcraft, she realized there were some things that were more important than her own life.

MELINDA: Once Matthew had what he wanted, he told the town council I was a witch, and they arrested me. Then they burned me at the stake.

PIPER: Why didn't you save yourself?

PHOEBE: Yeah, why didn't you use your powers to escape?

MELINDA: I had a daughter. Her name was Prudence. She meant everything to me. If I'd used my powers, I would've proven Matthew's charge, and Prudence would've burned too. No, I thought, I'll accept this, and pray some kind soul will take pity on my daughter and raise her in a safe home. Only then can the Warren line continue. And it must have worked, because here you are.¹²³

Therefore, the writers of *Charmed* argued that if the people of Salem had actually identified real witches during their legal proceedings, these women might have hidden their true identity to protect those whom they loved. And, because there were several cases of family members being accused of witchcraft together, based almost entirely on their biological relationships with one another, this explanation also has a loose basis in historical reality.

Similarly, in *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane*, Katherine Howe provided her readers with the "true" account of what took place at Salem through interludes – sections of her novel that told the story of Deliverance Dane's role in the Salem crisis. In one of these flashback scenes, Deliverance used the "egg-in-water" method of divination to see the future, realizing that "the girls [were] dissembling" and that those afflicted were "sure bewitched."¹²⁴ But, she told her daughter Mercy that, as a "cunning woman," she could not share this information with anyone, for fear that she would likely be one of the first individuals accused of practicing witchcraft.

Whom do you think the townsfolk will look to? . . . How soon before all their healed calves and found pewter and well-timed plantings and soothed ailings vanish in their haste to find someone to blame?¹²⁵

But ultimately, Deliverance was accused. When her daughter attempted to save her life on the night before her scheduled execution, Goody Dane argued, just as Melinda Warren had, that she had to sacrifice her own life to ensure that Mercy was allowed to live and to continue the good works that she had tried to perform during her life.

Now, listen to me, my daughter . . . I'll have you leave from Salem Town. I'll brook no argument. . . . You'll see from poor Dorcas that the Court enjoins to look for malefaction within families. You're to go. . . . It is you who are Peter, my daughter. You who are the stone on which the church is built. For through you may His power in all its infinite goodness be felt upon the earth. And so you must not pass your days in fear and recrimination. You must endeavor to secure your safety, and then you must not forbear to resume your craft, for it is God's work that you do.¹²⁶

As this passage illustrates, Howe's explanation of the crisis simultaneously allowed for the reality of witchcraft as a cause of the Salem trials, and of the existence of "good" witches who relied on their skills and abilities to achieve the same Christian goals as those of the judges and ministers in this colonial Puritan community.

Finally, the writers and directors of current television show, the *Vampire Diaries*, made an interesting and uniquely powerful statement about the legacy that would remain today if Americans accepted the idea that the individuals who died at Salem had indeed been real witches. As the first season of the show began, Bonnie struggled to determine whether or not her grandmother's insistence that she was a witch was the truth, or merely the ramblings of an old woman who had merely had too much to drink. However, what Bonnie was certain of was the fact that her family history could be traced back to Salem.

When she informed Stefan (a vampire) of her lineage, he made an interesting assessment about the impact of the witches who died in the 1692 crisis.

BONNIE: My family came by way of Salem.

STEFAN: Really? Salem witches?

BONNIE: Yeah.

STEFAN: I'd say that's pretty cool.

BONNIE: Really? Why?

STEFAN: Salem witches are heroic examples of individualism and nonconformity.

BONNIE: Yeah, they are.¹²⁷

Thus, the argument here was that if real witches had indeed died in Salem, they should be respected for practicing witchcraft during a period when such behavior was considered to be deviant and deserving of capital punishment.

While these explanations of the trials are interesting to consider, they are far from the norm within contemporary popular culture artifacts that have contributed to American public memory of the Salem witchcraft crisis. Indeed, a vast majority of these texts argued that, whether or not witchcraft itself was a reality, the trials themselves had nothing to do with actually locating witches. Indeed, the writers who scripted the episode of *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* that referenced the events at Salem took great care to communicate this idea to their audience members. In "The Crucible," Sabrina, had to decide whether or not to go on a weekend field trip with her history class to Salem Village. She told her aunts that "Salem sounds like a dangerous place for a witch," but her Aunt Zelda assured her that "the Salem witch trials had nothing to do with real witches."¹²⁸ With this in mind, Sabrina

reluctantly agreed to go on the trip. But once the students arrived, they quickly found themselves re-creating the suspicion, fear, and paranoia that took control of Salem in 1692. Within hours, Sabrina was accused of being a witch and called her aunts in a panic, asking them to come pick her up. When they inquired about why she wanted to leave, Sabrina provided them with the following explanation:

SABRINA: Well, we've been doing this role playing game.

AUNT ZELDA: Well that sounds like fun.

SABRINA: No it's not. People think I got a witch card. They've accused me of being a witch.

AUNT HILDA: I tell you, this town needs a disco.

AUNT ZELDA: So do you have the witch card?

SABRINA: I don't know. I didn't even look at mine, and I have no idea where it is.

AUNT HILDA: This is new. Mortals have been accusing each other for centuries, but I think this may be the first time they actually got a real witch.¹²⁹

This joking attitude about the ability of humans to use legal proceedings to genuinely identify real witches was common throughout the artifacts I examined for this project. Even the texts that affirmed the reality of witchcraft through their characters and storylines were typically adamant that the events that took place at Salem were completely unrelated to actual witches. Thus, these rhetors had to turn to other lines of reasoning to provide explanations of what took place in 1692, and they did this through five different arguments. As a group, they contended that the trials resulted from the "hysterical" human fear of those who were different, simple ignorance, misguided religious fervor, a lack of verifiable proof in

the courtroom, and the unchecked power of Massachusetts' political, legal, and religious leadership.

First, *Bewitched*, *Sabrina*, and *Buffy* all introduced the idea that the trials were caused by a dangerous mixture of the seemingly innate human fear of difference, intensified by what psychologists today have termed the phenomenon of hysteria. When Samantha (a witch) and Darrin (her mortal husband) visited Salem, Massachusetts during the seventh season of *Bewitched*, he became curious about the trials that had been held there three hundred years earlier. Samantha quickly assured him that “there were no real witches involved in the witch trials,” and her mother Endora explained that the crisis was all a result of “mortal prejudice and hysteria.”¹³⁰

Sabrina's history teacher, who had organized and chaperoned her high school field trip to Salem Village in “The Crucible,” echoed this idea in the speech she gave to her students at the conclusion of their field trip.

TEACHER: I hope you enjoyed your stay in Salem. But before we get on the bus, I want to let you in on a secret. What we've been studying is not just seventeenth century life, but human nature. The persecution and the hysteria of three hundred years ago arose again today. And all it took was an idea planted in your head – the idea that someone different was among you.

HARVEY: So who did have the witch cards?

TEACHER: No one had the witch card. Every single card said townspeople. I didn't create the witches. You did.¹³¹

Similarly, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Giles, the high school librarian, provided the students with a similar explanation when their town was faced with their own “witch hunt” of sorts.

In describing why such events had occurred throughout history, he made the following argument:

GILES: Some demons thrive by fostering hatred and persecution amongst the mortal elements – not by destroying them but by watching them destroy each other. They feed us our darkest fear and turn peaceful communities into vigilantes.

BUFFY: Hansel and Gretel run home to tell everyone about the mean old witch.

GILES: And she and probably dozens of others are persecuted by a righteous mob. It's happened all throughout history. It happened in Salem, not surprisingly.¹³²

Although he was speaking of a literal demon in this context, it is simple to interpret this excerpt as a metaphor, substituting a variety of influences, from political tensions to social conflicts for the “demon,” or the origin of the fears that sparked such a dramatic transition from peace to violence.

Without a doubt, this explanation does have a firm basis in the historical reality of the events that unfolded during 1692. Regardless of what other major factors might have contributed to Salem's witchcraft crisis, seventeenth century Puritan culture certainly did not place great value on individuality, and these popular contemporary artifacts made a vital argument by highlighting the fact that the power of fearing things considered to be “different” knows neither cultural nor temporal boundaries.

The second interpretation of what took place at Salem was developed primarily in the *Vampire Diaries*. As the first season progressed, viewers learned that Bonnie and her grandmother were indeed both witches, and eventually, Bonnie asked her “Grams” for information about their family's involvement in the 1692 crisis.

BONNIE: Was our family burned in the witch trials?

GRAMS: No, the girls that were persecuted in Salem were entirely innocent. You have to have more than ignorance to trap a real witch.¹³³

Thus, the rhetors responsible for creating this plotline argued that rather than the knowledge that individuals such as Increase and Cotton Mather believed they were armed with, the leadership in Salem Village was actually acting from a place of ignorance when they began to deal with accusations of witchcraft. Of course, this lack of knowledge could certainly feed a society's fear of difference, but this line of reasoning made a uniquely important statement about the inherent power of ignorance, an influence that was certainly an important contributing factor in Salem's witchcraft crisis.

The third rationalization was developed when the rhetors responsible for creating and scripting the animated television series *The Simpsons* used the Puritan's infamous religious fervor as the basis for their humorous interpretation of why so many individuals were convicted and executed at Salem. In the segment of this series' 1997 Halloween episode that was tied to the events surrounding the witchcraft crisis, audience members saw the fictional residents of "Salem Village" standing in a crowd to witness the death of an old woman who had been convicted of the crime of witchcraft. After the execution had been carried out, a townsman in the crowd turned to a man who was stereotypically dressed as a minister and announced, "Well, that's seventy-five witches we've processed. That ought to show God whose side we're on, say pastor?"¹³⁴ Although some individuals have certainly argued that the Puritans' religious beliefs should not be held responsible for the witchcraft crisis, this project has illustrated that there is indeed some degree of truth to support *The*

Simpsons' fictitious representation. Indeed, the Puritan residents of Salem Village were intensely motivated to show God their piety and commitment when it came to fighting the forces of Satan on earth. Thus, this explanation, which might be brushed off as a joke on first glance, actually makes a vital point about the desires and beliefs of the individuals living in Salem Village during 1692.

The fourth explanation that can be identified in these popular culture references to Salem is one that was mentioned numerous times in Brattle's letter objecting to the manner in which the Salem trials were being conducted – the lack of verifiable proof to support accusations of witchcraft. This theme was central to Arthur Miller's argument in his play, *The Crucible*. In Act II of this work, when John Proctor's servant Mary Warren returned home after serving as a witness in the witchcraft proceedings, she reported that the accused were being tested to determine their guilt or innocence in the following manner:

MARY WARREN: Aye, but then Judge Hathorne say, "Recite for us your commandments!" – *leaning avidly toward them* – and of all the ten she could not say a single one. She never knew no commandments, and they had her in a flat lie!

PROCTOR: And so condemned her?

MARY WARREN: Why, they must when she condemned herself.

PROCTOR: But the proof, the proof!

MARY WARREN: I told you the proof. It's hard proof, hard as rock, the judges said.¹³⁵

Although Miller was one of the first rhetors to use contemporary popular culture forms to express concern about the problems that had been caused throughout history when judges

presiding over “witch trials” failed to require proof before finding someone guilty of a crime, he was far from the last.

In “Samantha’s Old Salem Trip,” from season seven of *Bewitched*, Samantha was accidentally sent back to Salem Village in the year 1692, and she quickly found herself in a courtroom, on trial for witchcraft. The creators and writers of this show elected to use this situation as an opportunity to make a point about the importance of having proof to ensure that innocent people were not put to death on the mere basis of accusation and innuendo. Samantha began by confessing that she was, in fact, a witch, and then went on to illustrate why Salem’s decision to convict and execute members of their community for practicing witchcraft without insisting on proof had been a mistake.

SAMANTHA: I am a witch. But I am going to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that none of the others, none of those accused, actually were witches.

JUDGE: What is the basis for this absurd contention?

SAMANTHA: Do you think that mere iron shackles could contain me? Now, how can mortals prosecute creatures who can transform themselves, who can cause fire, flood, and storm? How can you imprison someone who can vanish before your very eyes?¹³⁶

At this point, Samantha used her magical abilities to remove the shackles from her wrists, light a fire, disappear, and then reappear in front of the crowd in the courtroom. Then, once she had left her audience with more than sufficient proof to support her contention, she concluded her argument by reminding her audience of who and what was really to blame for the witchcraft crisis.

SAMANTHA: Now, do you understand? The people that you persecuted were guiltless. They were mortals just like yourselves. You are the guilty.

JUDGE: It is the recommendation of the court that we all repair to our homes and reflect carefully on the illusions that we have seen and heard this day. Then have a pint of ale and forget that it ever happened. [Samantha and Darrin disappear] Let us attribute these hallucinations to our own witch hysteria. I hereby decree an end to these and future trials.¹³⁷

As this fictional scene came to a close, the physical proof of witchcraft took on a role that it never did in the actual trials of 1692. In the case of this pop culture artifact, a witch's use of her powers provided the actual proof that the judge needed to understand that previous accusations had all been false. Thus, this storyline suggests that one way or another, if the leadership of Salem Village had insisted on proof of the existence of witchcraft before condemning and executing the accused, the witch hunt might have been avoided all together.

The rhetors who created the Halloween episode of *The Simpsons* that I referenced earlier relied on satire and humor to raise similar concerns about the lack of proof in Salem's trials at two different points. First, when the community came together in the meetinghouse for a formal witchcraft inquiry, the judge opened the session by declaring: "let us throw open the floor to wild accusations."¹³⁸ Then, as the town gathered for the execution of a few individuals who had been found guilty of practicing witchcraft, Lisa began to wonder why real witches would allow themselves to be killed, and voiced her question aloud to her father.

LISA: If they're really witches, why don't they use their powers to escape?

HOMER: That sounds like witch-talk to me Lisa.

LISA: Never mind.¹³⁹

Although the show used this exchange to make their viewers laugh, this excerpt had a larger, underlying theme – that those who questioned the proceedings, the decisions of the court, or even the existence of witchcraft itself by daring to wonder about the actual proof of confederacy with the Devil, might themselves be guilty. And historical accounts support the fact that this mindset was undoubtedly a real element of Salem’s historic witchcraft crisis.

Finally, popular culture references to the events at Salem posited that the unquestioned power and irrationality of the court and its leadership were significant factors in understanding why the trials spun out of control. Again, *The Simpsons’* segment, “Easy-Bake Coven,” contributed to this theme through presenting its audience with a humorous situation. After Marge (or Goody Simpson as she was referred to in this episode) had been accused of witchcraft, the town took her out to a cliff to perform a test that was intended to determine whether or not she was actually in confederacy with Satan.

TOWNSMAN: Ok, here’s how the process works. You sit on the broom and we shove you off the cliff.

GOODY SIMPSON (MARGE): What?

TOWNSMAN: Well hear me out. If you’re innocent, you will fall to an honorable Christian death. If, however, you are the bride of Satan, you will surely fly your broom to safety. At that point you will report back here for torture and beheading.

NED: Tough, but fair.

LISA: Stop! Doesn’t the Bible say, “judge not, lest ye be judged?”

[Murmuring in the crowd.]

TOWNSMAN: The Bible says a lot of things. Shove her!¹⁴⁰

Although this exact form of a “witch test” was not used in 1692, it bears a great deal of resemblance to the “water test” or the “Lord’s Prayer test” that were actually used during

witchcraft trials in both Europe and the American colonies. However, historical accuracy was not necessary for this instance of public memory to raise important questions about some of the illogical legal decisions that certainly contributed to the crisis in Salem.

Additionally, both *Bewitched* and *The Simpsons* used plot elements to argue that courtroom officials were given too much unregulated authority during the witch trials. In “Samantha’s Old Salem Trip,” this issue of control was raised as a townsman testified against Samantha during her trial.

TOWNSMAN: And then she draws that strange quill from her pocket, and hands it to Master Fairly. At once, I knew it to be an instrument of the Devil.

JUDGE: How so?

TOWNSMAN: It had an unholy glow about it.

SAMANTHA: That is absolute nonsense.

JUDGE: The court will decide what is nonsense and what is not.¹⁴¹

The extant records of the Salem witchcraft trials do not contain any exchanges where the judges were quite this blunt in exercising their unrestrained power over the legal process, however the rhetors responsible for this episode of *Bewitched* did make a very accurate assessment of which individuals were given the authority to determine truth during the 1692 trials.

Similarly, when Goody Simpson attempted to stop the Salem villagers from allowing their accusations to spin out of control in *The Simpsons*, she found herself accused of witchcraft.

GOODY SIMPSON (MARGE): Let’s come to our senses everyone. This witch hunt is turning into a circus.

TOWNSMAN: She's the witch!

CROWD: Yeah, she's the witch!

GOODY SIMPSON (MARGE): This is crazy. I'm not a witch.

TOWNSWOMAN: Then how come your laundry is always much whiter than mine.

JUDGE: Oh, I've heard enough. Burn her!

CROWD: Burn her!¹⁴²

Again, although this scene took the memory of the Salem crisis to a humorous extreme, it was clearly based on the public memories that Americans have developed about the witchcraft trials. In many ways, the judges and ministers who were in control of the events that unfolded during 1692 had constructed this level of power for themselves through the rhetorical treatises they had written in the years preceding the crisis. Thus, these public memory references make a valid assessment in arguing that the trust and authority that the residents of Salem Village assigned to their political and religious leaders ultimately made these men partially responsible for the lives that were disrupted and lost as a result of witchcraft allegations.

Remembering to Develop The Theme of The "Witch Hunt." The Urban Dictionary defines a "witch hunt," as "a search, chase or pursuit for one or more, 'witches.'"¹⁴³ The fact that this contemporary database of American slang elected to place quotation marks around the word "witches" in their definition is not surprising, because the theme of a "witch hunt" has taken on a much broader and more negative connotation in the three hundred years that have elapsed since colonial Puritans set out to discover which individuals in their community were in confederacy with Satan. In general, this larger

theme can be traced directly back to playwright Arthur Miller who wrote “*The Crucible*” during the Cold War era. In a preface to the 1952 edition of this work, Miller made the following assessment of the rhetorical situation surrounding the Salem witchcraft trials:

The times, to their eyes, must have been out of joint, and to the common folk must have seemed as insoluble and complicated as do ours today. It is not hard to see how confusion had been brought upon them by deep and darkling forces. No hint of such speculation appears on the court record, but social disorder in any age breeds such mystical suspicions, and when, as in Salem, wonders are brought forth from below the social surface, it is too much to expect people to hold back very long from laying on the victims with all the force of their frustrations.¹⁴⁴

Through the plot of *The Crucible*, Miller argued that in both Salem of 1692 and America of the early 1950s, rampant fear and suspicion jeopardized justice and freedom by creating a false dilemma and presuming the guilt rather than the innocence of those accused.

Although the individuals who attended the original Broadway performances of *The Crucible* had to draw parallels between the Salem witch trials and the Cold War on their own, those who read the published version of Miller’s play had access to the author’s notes comparing these two situations. In setting the scene for Act I, Miller wrote that

since 1692 a great but superficial change has wiped out God’s beard and the Devil’s horns, but the world is still gripped between two diametrically opposed absolutes. . . . in America any man who is not reactionary in his views is open to the charge of alliance with the Red hell. Political opposition, thereby is given an inhumane overlay which then justifies the abrogation of all normally applied customs of civilized intercourse. A political policy is equated with moral right, and opposition to it with diabolical malevolence. Once such an equation is effectively made, society becomes a congeries of plots and counterplots, and the main role of government changes from that of the arbiter to that of the scourge of God.¹⁴⁵

As this quotation illustrates, Miller argued that although the names of the heroes and the villains had changed since 1692, the legal proceedings during the Salem witchcraft crisis and the Cold War were both largely driven by fear and suspicion.

Although many individuals look to *The Crucible* as the seminal, and perhaps the clearest application of the witch hunt theme in contemporary life, several other popular culture texts have found ways to use this framework in developing a variety of different arguments within their plotlines. For example, in the second season of *The West Wing*, white house staffers learned that information key to one of their long-term projects had been leaked to the press – a mistake which would be detrimental to the success of the project. Because of the nature of this information, senior staff members understood that the leak had to have come from someone fairly close to the project. As a result, Press Secretary C. J. Cregg was charged with questioning each of the hundreds of individuals who had access to the information and could have been responsible for the leak. One of her interviews with an aide ended with the following exchange:

AIDE: You mind if I give you a suggestion that may make this go faster?

C. J.: Sure.

AIDE: If you dunk the suspect in a deep well of water, and they drown, it means they're not a witch.

C. J.: Alright, that's it!

AIDE: I saw Lizzie Proctor speaking with the Devil.

C. J.: Shut up!¹⁴⁶

This exchange was ultimately humorous, with C. J. walking out and giving up on the trying to find the leak at all. And, later in the same episode, she argued that it would have be

impossible to discover who was responsible for releasing the information since they had no way of proving whether or not their accusations were correct. Thus, even this brief reference to the events that took place at Salem clearly illustrated how an otherwise straightforward quest to assign guilt could quickly become far more serious.

The series of episodes in *Bewitched*'s seventh season that detailed Darrin and Samantha's trip to Salem, Massachusetts, highlighted another way in which the theme of the witch hunt has been utilized in contemporary texts. In the first episode of the season, after Samantha was informed that she had been summoned to attend the witches' convocation at Salem, she also learned that a few witches with significant power and influence in her world had serious concerns about her marriage to a mortal and were considering whether or not to get rid of her husband. Eventually, after several episodes and numerous crisis situations, the witches' council decided that Samantha and Darrin's marriage should be dissolved. But Samantha was not going to simply acquiesce to their verdict, so in the conclusion of the eighth episode of the season, Samantha returned to the council to convince them to change their minds. She reported on the success of her argument in the following exchange with her husband:

DARRIN: Where have you been?

SAMANTHA: I had a little unfinished business with the witches' council, remember?

DARRIN: That's right. What happened?

SAMANTHA: Good news. I don't have to go back to Salem.

DARRIN: That's terrific. How come?

SAMANTHA: I pointed out to them that in their own way, they're just as bad as the people behind the original witch hunts. And their attitude toward our marriage is just as prejudiced and bigoted.¹⁴⁷

Rather than discussing the importance of evidence to support accusations, this exchange highlighted an equally important aspect of the witch hunt theme – the danger of allowing prejudice, and not logical thought, to be the guiding force behind any decision-making process.

Finally, the “Gingerbread” episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* raised some interesting questions about the origins of witch hunts. After Buffy’s mother Joyce found two murdered children on a playground, she decided that steps had to be taken to reduce the crime rate in the town of Sunnydale. She explained her reasoning in the following speech, made during a town vigil to honor the dead children:

This is not a good town. How many of us have lost someone who just disappeared, or got skinned, or suffered neck rupture? And how many of us have been too afraid to speak out? I was supposed to lead us in a moment of silence, but silence is this town’s disease. For too long, we’ve been plagued by unnatural evils. This isn’t our town anymore. It belongs to the monsters, and the witches, and the slayers. I say it’s time for the grownups to take Sunnydale back. I say we start by finding the people who did this and making them pay.¹⁴⁸

Joyce highlighted an essential aspect of the theme of witch hunting in this excerpt.

Although we often overlook it, “witch hunts,” whether they are quests to find literal or metaphorical witches, generally begin with the desire to stop some form of evil from continuing to harm society. Indeed, the searches for Satan’s confederates in Salem, communist sympathizers in Cold War America, and terrorists in a post-9/11 world each began with the desire to seek out and eliminate the origins and perpetrators of evil. And in

the end, it is this lesson that is so important to take away from a discussion of the theme of the witch hunt, because society must be aware of the ways in which their actions could so easily turn from honorable to prejudicial and even discriminatory if they ever hope to stop the cycle of witch hunting that has carried on long after the colonial trials were brought to a close.

Therefore, the theme of the witch hunt is often used by contemporary Americans as a powerful rhetorical tool that simultaneously advocates the importance of pursuing justice in the face of the politics of fear, and cautions against the unregulated and unthinking application of such justice. In his *Legal History* of the Salem witchcraft trials, Hoffer makes an interesting assessment of the impact of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Hoffer argues that "Miller's work is an inspiration to us, for it reminds us that we are not proof against the superstition and rumormongering that brought on the tragedy in Salem."¹⁴⁹ For as Miller wrote in his 1996 *New Republic* article, "the play seems to present the same primeval structure of human sacrifice to the furies of fanaticism and paranoia that goes on repeating itself forever as though imbedded in the brain of social man."¹⁵⁰

A Final Thought: Finding Meaning in Our Memories

After a short recess, we'll deal with the appointment of the new resident witch of Salem. As you well know, this office was created out of the wisdom of the High Priestess Hepsibah, in the year 1692, dedicated to protect the image of the witch. And if necessary, through the use of witchcraft, to protect those innocent people who may be accused as witches, as well as to protect against themselves, those mortals so foolish as to cry "witch!"

Endora, *Bewitched*¹⁵¹

As this analysis has illustrated, rhetors have used multitude of different rhetorical tools and situations to reference and reconstruct contemporary American public memory of the Salem witchcraft crisis through popular culture. Some of the artifacts examined in this chapter argued that the trials found and executed real witches, while others claimed that real witches could never be caught and killed by mortals. A few artifacts used the historical events of the trials to bring a sense of reality to their plots, while others relied on the audience's memory of the events that took place at Salem to create punch lines for their jokes. And of course, while some artifacts dealt primarily with accurate information about what happened in Salem, others intentionally manipulated historical facts to make the crisis seem more dramatic, more horrific than its already sobering reality.¹⁵²

But why do these differences exist? I argue that there is a great deal to be learned by examining the ways in which public memory differs from what historians would term “historical accuracy,” and considering both *what* makes these two accounts different, and *why* these differences exist. Indeed, these two questions speak to the core of public memory – how do our collective memories of the past diverge from historical record, and why is this divergence so significant. In this chapter, I have tried to address these issues by contrasting the dominant official and vernacular public memories of the Salem witchcraft crisis that are held by Americans today.

As I argued in my review of our official memory of the trials, public school classrooms in the twenty-first century teach children and young adults that the Salem witch

trials were bad and resulted in the deaths of innocent people. But nearly all of the textbooks I reviewed remained virtually silent when the time came to inform students about the details of the event. It was an even more rare occurrence for these artifacts to ask students to consider a diversity of influences that could have collided to serve as the catalyst for this crisis. Indeed, because the “official” American public memories of the witch trials have been so vague, they have created a multitude of opportunities for the creators of vernacular memory to play with, transform, and at times entirely change the events that took place during the 1690s for the advancement of their plots.

But why did so many rhetors working in a diversity of genres and creating artifacts for a range of audiences choose to manipulate and change our historical knowledge about the Salem crisis? My analysis in this chapter argued that the fictionalization of the witch trials served to remember the woman as witch, to offer an explanation for the witchcraft crisis, and to develop the theme of the witch hunt. Because these arguments were made within the vernacular context of popular culture, they were not only compelling from a critical thinking perspective, but they also had the additional benefit of capturing audience attention because of their value as entertainment. As I have argued at several points throughout this project, narratives are uniquely powerful tools for communicating ideas and developing arguments, and in the case of contemporary American public memory about the Salem crisis, stories have provided an important channel through which deeper ideas about societal issues have been made accessible to a wider audience.

But in addition to providing a medium for the transmission of arguments, public memory of the Salem crisis also serves a greater and more fundamental purpose in society today. Indeed, the excerpt from Endora's speech in the *Bewitched* episode "Samantha's Bad Day in Salem" that served as the epigraph for this final section of the present chapter raises an interesting point about the role that contemporary public memory of the Salem crisis can fill. Just as the fictional "resident witch of Salem" position was created to prevent mortals from repeating the events of 1692, rhetors who elect to reference the trials in their artifacts today can also take an active role in preventing new generations of Americans from forgetting about the important lessons of the past that can and should inform our present.

Notes

1. Katherine Howe, *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2009), 140.
2. Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* (June 1995): 214.
3. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (New York, NY: Harper-Colophon Books, 1950).
4. Lewis A. Coser, introduction to *On Collective Memory* by Maurice Halbwachs (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 34.
5. In many texts, scholars refer to the field of public memory as an interdisciplinary topic area that is much larger than any one discipline. Zelizer goes as far as arguing that "in pace with the constitution of the social sciences themselves, which have influenced the interdisciplinary nature of much of memory's analysis, the study of collective memory has virtually erased interdisciplinary boundaries" ("Reading the Past Against the Grain," 216).
6. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 53.
7. Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain," 216.
8. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 8-9.
9. David Thelen, "Memory and American History," *The Journal of American History* 75 (March 1989): 1117.
10. Steven Knapp, "Collective Memory and the Actual Past," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 123.

11. Robin Wagner-Pacifici, "Memories in the Making: The Shapes of Things that Went," *Qualitative Sociology* 19 (1996): 315.
12. Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain," 225.
13. M. Lane Bruner, "Rhetorical Theory and the Critique of National Identity Construction," *National Identities* 7 (September 2005): 316.
14. Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, introduction to *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 5.
15. Gil Eyal, "Identity and Trauma: Two Forms of the Will to Memory," *History and Memory* 16 (Spring/Summer 2004): 8.
16. As a result of the fundamental nature of this conclusion, many scholars have made a special effort of highlighting the "public" nature of public memories. Indeed, Zelizer's review essay notes that "scholars have come increasingly to see memory as a social activity, accomplished not in the privacy of one's own gray matter but via shared consciousness with others," ("Reading the Past Against the Grain," 215) and rhetorician Stephen H. Browne agrees with Zelizer's conclusion in arguing that "public memory, though claimed by many, is the sole property of none" ("Reading, Rhetoric, and the Texture of Public Memory," 245).
17. Wagner-Pacifici, "Memories in the Making: The Shapes of Things that Went," 312.
18. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1993), 13.
19. Beverley Southgate, "Memories into Something New: Histories for the Future," *Rethinking History* 11 (June 2007): 188.
20. John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 15.
21. Anna Lisa Tota, "Review Essay: Public Memory and Cultural Trauma," *Javnost – The Public* 13 (2006): 82-83.
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98. Of the artifacts examined in this chapter, some of the best examples of this stereotypical setting are *Bewitched*. Episode no. 7-08, "Samantha's Old Salem Trip," first broadcast November 12, 1970 by ABC. Directed by Richard Michaels and written by Ed Jurist; *Hocus Pocus*, DVD, directed by Kenny Ortega (1993; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios Video, 2002); and *The Crucible*, DVD, directed by Nicholas Hytner (1996; Century City, CA: 20th Century Fox, 2004).

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111. *Bewitched*. Episode no. 7-08, "Samantha's Old Salem Trip," first broadcast November 12, 1970 by ABC. Directed by Richard Michaels and written by Ed Jurist.
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118. Howe, *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane*, 292.
119. *Saturday Night Live*. Episode no. 348, first broadcast October 2, 1993.

120. *The Simpsons*. Episode no. 904, "Treehouse of Horror VII," first broadcast October 26, 1997 by the Fox Broadcasting Company. Directed by Mark Kirkland and written by Mike Scully, David S. Cohen and Ned Goldreyer.
121. *So You Think You Can Dance*. Episode no. 603, "Audition Episode #3: Boston," first broadcast September 23, 2009 by the Fox Broadcasting Company. Directed by Nigel Lythgoe.
122. *Hocus Pocus*, DVD, directed by Kenny Ortega.
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128. *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*. Episode no. 23, "The Crucible."
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132. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Episode no. 45, "Gingerbread," first broadcast January 12, 1999 by the WB. Directed by James Whitmore, Jr. and written by Jane Espenson, Thania St. John, and Jane Espenson.
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147. *Bewitched*. Episode no. 7-08, "Samantha's Old Salem Trip."

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149. Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: A Legal History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 8.

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CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION:

RHETORICALLY CONSTRUCTING THE SALEM WITCHCRAFT

CRISIS YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

There's something fascinating about violent death . . . Especially if it happened to someone very distant from you. . . . And so we don't feel guilty reveling in their suffering.

Katherine Howe, *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane* ¹

One of the practical lessons inculcated by the history that has now been related is, that no duty is more certain, none more important, than a free and fearless expression of opinion, by all persons, on all occasions. No wise or philosophic person would think of complaining of the diversities of sentiment it is likely to develop. Such diversities are the vital principle of free communities, and the only elements of popular intelligence. If the right to utter them is asserted by all and for all, tolerance is secured, and no inconvenience results. It is probable that there were many persons here in 1692 who doubted the propriety of the proceedings at their commencement, but who were afterwards prevailed upon to fall into the current and swell the tide. If they had all discharged their duty to their country and their consciences by freely and boldly uttering their disapprobation and declaring their dissent, who can tell but that the whole tragedy might have been prevented? And, if it might, the blood of the innocent may be said, in one sense, to be upon their heads.

Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft* ²

In his 2003 review essay, Aune argued that “witchcraft is a good example of the power of what Burke called ‘symbolic action.’ The idea that words can affect human behavior lies at the root of both magic and the rhetorical tradition, what John O. Ward has

called the dialectical tension between rhetoric as ‘magic’ and rhetoric as ‘control.’”³ This connection has served as a grounding theme throughout my investigation of the rhetoric surrounding the Salem witchcraft crisis. For, as Burke argued in his *Permanence and Change*, when “we interpret situations differently . . . we invent new accounts of motive. [And essentially] both the old and the new motives are linguistically constructed.”⁴ Thus, I have examined three different interpretations, or as Burke would term them “terministic screens,” of the colonial witchcraft trials from three different rhetorical perspectives to gain some understanding of the ways in which rhetoric has been utilized to construct the societal perceptions of witchcraft and shape public understanding of what took place in Salem Village during 1692.

The quotation that served as the primary title to this project was written in 1697 by John Higginson in his introduction to Hale’s *A Modest Inquiry*. At the time he penned this “epistle to the reader,” Higginson was the eighty-two year old senior pastor of the church in the town of Salem. He argued that, among other reasons, Hale’s artifact was needed so “that the truth of things may be more fully known.”⁵ In many ways, Higginson’s hope for Hale’s narrative was also my goal for this project. Throughout this rhetorical examination of the Salem crisis, I have clearly argued that I was not attempting to discover a definitive explanation for why the witch trials took place. In fact, my argument has been nearly the opposite – that no such definitive explanation exists. Instead, I have argued that the crisis was a complex event that resulted from the constraints, pressures, and influence of a number of different social forces. Thus, in the tradition of Higginson and Hale, a significant

element motivating my examination of the witchcraft crisis has been to use the methodology and perspective of rhetorical analysis to reveal a new layer of understanding about the now infamous history of colonial Salem Village.

I approached this analysis from three different chronological and rhetorical viewpoints. In Chapter II, I built upon work done by scholars such as McGee, White, and Charland in the area of constitutive rhetoric to address the question of how the witchcraft crisis was initiated and fueled rhetorically. Then, as my examination shifted to the rhetorical artifacts constructed immediately after the trials in Chapter III, I relied on the tradition of *apologia*, rooted in the ancient Greek understanding of stasis theory to understand how rhetorical elements were utilized by influential rhetors to craft a variety of different explanations for the crisis. And finally in Chapter IV, I drew from individuals such as Halbwachs, Kammen, Zelizer, and Bodnar, working in the cross-disciplinary field of public memory, to respond to the questions of how we remember the trials today and what impact these memories have on our understanding of the themes of witchcraft and witch hunting in contemporary American society.

In examining the rhetorical artifacts that were highly influential in the years preceding the crisis, my goal was to use the framework of constitutive rhetoric to introduce a thread that had not been specifically explored before into the centuries old discussion of what caused the trials to occur. My analysis was focused on four specific artifacts that significantly contributed to the dominant Puritan perspective on witchcraft in the years immediately before the accusations began in Salem Village: Increase Mather's *Illustrious*

Providences, Cotton Mather's *Memorable Providences*, and two of Samuel Parris' sermons – "Christ Knows How Many Devils There Are," and "These Shall Make War with the Lamb." But before drawing conclusions from these rhetorical works, I noted that several aspects of the genre of constitutive rhetoric were uniquely relevant to my investigation. Four of these deserve mention here.

First, scholars writing about a community's ability to constitute their identity through rhetoric have argued that concepts such as group unity are fleeting. And, as this project has illustrated, a community's decision about what it values and what it accepts as truth can change swiftly and drastically. Indeed, the witchcraft crisis might be one of the best examples of the transient nature of group identity because the residents of Salem Village transformed from quiet and peaceful individuals, to a group dominated and controlled by fear, and back to a relatively calm society in a period of less than two years. Additionally, I argued that constitutive rhetoric has been proven to be especially powerful in religious contexts because those who have accepted religion are already acclimated to the idea that rhetorical texts, often in the form of scripture and religious teachings, have significant power to construct both the community to which they belong and the values that such a society holds. Thus, for the pious Puritan congregation in Salem Village, the texts on witchcraft I examined in this project were exceptionally powerful.

Third, a few scholars have written specifically about the power of constitutive rhetoric to legitimize violence. Because of the intensely cruel and deadly nature of Salem's trials, the work of individuals such as Drzewiecka and Morus was particularly relevant to

this project. Indeed, their claim that rhetoric could be used by a society's leadership to normalize acts of violence offers a unique layer of insight into how constitutive discourse impacted the witchcraft crisis. Finally, in building upon Fisher and Bormann's contentions about the narrative, I argued that Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and Samuel Parris added a new dimension of power to their artifacts by supporting their logical argumentation about witchcraft with a variety of narratives about the reality of Satan's power and his influence over humanity.

Additionally, my analysis of the ways in which rhetoric influenced the trials was grounded in the rhetorical situation of colonial New England. In *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane*, author and historian Katherine Howe provided the following explanation of the historical context surrounding the witchcraft crisis:

What is usually overlooked in these accounts is that, to the people who experienced the Salem panic, the trials were *really about witchcraft*. Everyone involved – judges, jury, clergymen, accusers, and defendants – lived in a religious system that held no doubt whatsoever that witches existed, and that the Devil could make mischief on earth through human interlocutors. . . . And to some extent, witchcraft *was* real, though not in the ways that we think of it today. Medieval and early modern England held a long tradition of so-called cunning folk, local wise people who sold occult services ranging from basic divination, to the location of lost property, to the healing of assorted illnesses. Specifically, the cunning person specialized in unbewitchment; if you suspected that a witch had cast a spell on you, the cunning person was your best hope for redress. They were unusually canny businesspeople, and their reputations were always rather suspect; after all, anyone with the power to remove spells could be assumed to have the ability to cast them, too.⁶

My analysis of rhetorical artifacts from this period concluded that such beliefs about the reality and danger of witchcraft were constructed through the religious rhetoric of the leading Puritan ministers within the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

More specifically, these rhetors developed two themes in an attempt to persuade their audiences what to believe and how to respond to their beliefs. To convince their congregants that witchcraft was indeed real, they presented them with a significant amount of narrative evidence of preternatural events in New England, discussed the limitations of evil, persuaded their audience that the Devil was indeed a powerful creature, explained how to differentiate between symptoms of possession and insanity, talked specifically about the existence of apparitions and spectres, and finally relied on logical argumentation to definitely “prove” the reality of witchcraft. But even in the face of these frightening realities, the Mathers and Samuel Parris were committed to persuading their audiences that faith, rather than action, was the correct response to acts of Satan on earth. In order to convince Puritans to trust in God’s control and leadership, these rhetors insisted that God was more powerful than Satan, that witchcraft was an aspect of God’s plan, that all Christians should be able to recognize specters and apparitions for what they were, that Puritans should turn away from folk magic, and that the only correct response to preternatural occurrences was to translate faith into action through living Godly lives and worshipping their creator.

Although these arguments proved to be highly successful, history has also proven that they contributed to a dangerous, unstable, and frightened society. After their religious leaders persuaded them to reject any physical response to the threat of witchcraft, they were

left without a legitimate way to cope with their fears. As time began to pass, and the crisis situation seemed to be escalating rather than finding some sort of resolution, the Puritans turned to the legal system to provide themselves with an avenue for fighting Satan without falling into sin.

When I shifted my focus to the rhetorical artifacts written in the wake of the crisis, I used the framework of *apologia* to understand how Massachusetts' religious and political leadership dealt with, talked about, and explained the witchcraft trials through their written and spoken public discourse. In this chapter, I examined seven different artifacts: "The Return of Several Ministers Consulted," Cotton Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*, Increase Mather's *Cases of Conscience*, William Phips' "Letter to Earl of Nottingham," Samuel Parris' "Meditations for Peace," Samuel Sewall's "Apology on the Fast Day," and John Hale's *A Modest Enquiry*. To frame my analysis of these texts within a theoretical context, I began this chapter with a fairly detailed overview of some of the major aspects of the field of *apologia*.

This review was primarily focused on three components of the rhetorical situation surrounding any piece of apologetic discourse – who is in crisis, what goals do/does the individual/group want to achieve through their *apologia*, and what strategies should the individual/group use to ensure that those goals are met? In discussing the question of who is in crisis, I emphasized the fact that the responses to the Salem witchcraft crisis were unique, in part, because they included rhetoric that could fit into four different categories: organizational *apologia*, individual *apologia*, political *apologia*, and religious *apologia*. As

scholars have written and theorized about the rhetoric of defense over the past century, they have developed a very long list of potential apologetic goals and strategies that they have organized into almost as many unique classification systems. In order to provide some structure for my discussion of these concepts, I relied on the classical Greek understanding of *stasis* theory. With this framework in mind, I argued that denial, shifting blame, and scapegoating each fulfilled the goals associated with the *stasis* of fact, that differentiation was the most appropriate strategy for a rhetor positioning their artifact within the *stasis of definition*, that defeasibility, bolstering, offering an excuse, and highlighting one's good intentions could be used successfully for rhetors whose goals aligned with the *stasis* of quality, and finally, that transcendence, attacking the accuser, promising corrective action, mortification, and presenting a full apology were each appropriate ways through which someone could position their discourse within the *stasis* of jurisdiction.

As Ryan and others have argued, while apologetic discourse can undoubtedly be analyzed on its own, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of its content and significance when these artifacts are examined alongside the rhetoric of *kategoria*, or accusation. Indeed, in his 1982 article, Ryan claimed that examples of *kategoria* and *apologia* (accusation and defense, respectively) should be examined as a "speech set."⁷ Following this line of argument, I introduced and summarized one of the most well developed examples of *kategoria* from the period of the witchcraft crisis. In his letter, Thomas Brattle made a series of accusations about the evidence accepted in the courtroom and the individuals participating in and leading the proceedings, before ultimately calling on the "afflicted" girls

to publicly acknowledge that their actions, accusations, and testimony had been nothing more than “a mere fancy and delusion of the Devil’s”⁸ and asking the justices to “see and acknowledge”⁹ the numerous mistakes they had made.

After illustrating the diversity of ways in which the religious and political leaders of the Salem community attempted to explain and excuse their actions, I concluded my analysis by assessing the success of their rhetoric within the four categories I used to identify *who* was in crisis. Because the cases of organizational *apologia* were primarily un-coordinated, often placed the political and religious leaders of the community in opposition to one another, and were written by individuals who were more concerned with salvaging their own reputations than that of the organization they were a part of, this category of apologetic response was a failure. The examples of political *apologia* examined in this chapter were slightly more successful. By relying on the *stases* of fact and quality, Governor Phips and John Hale were able to prevent themselves from losing their jobs or facing serious political setbacks. However, it is also important to note that while their apologetic discourse was successful during their own time period, it has not saved them from receiving a significant portion of the blame for the crisis in modern examinations of the trials.

The one example of organizational *apologia* that was actually coordinated came from the religious leadership of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. These men realized that although their opinions had made a significant impact on how the events had unfolded, they could not be specifically held responsible for making the legal decisions that had led to the deaths of so many. Because of this reality, these rhetors were able to find a fairly substantial degree

of success in shifting the blame for the crisis away from themselves. But these leaders were also able to use their religious beliefs to position their responses within the *stases* of definition and jurisdiction so that they were able to successfully argue that the crisis had been outside of human control, and should accordingly be judged by a higher power. Therefore, this group's apologetic discourse was among the most successful responses to the trials, and clearly highlighted the advantages that Salem's religious leaders held over their political counterparts in defending themselves against the accusations made in the months and years immediately after the crisis drew to a close.

As I mentioned earlier, most of the artifacts examined in this chapter were essentially examples of individuals attempting to clear their own names and reputations in light of the ultimately tragic nature of the witchcraft trials. Three of these defenses stand out and merit specific attention here. Samuel Parris' attempt at *apologia* has been generally considered unsuccessful in both the eyes of his contemporaries and modern scholars. Based on my analysis of the myriad strategies he incorporated into his relatively brief sermon, I concluded that this failure was largely due to his lack of focus and the conflicting messages he presented to his audience. On the other hand, Governor Phips' apologetic letter, full of excuses and blame shifting, was ultimately successful. Although organizationally, the political and judicial leaders of the trials are often viewed as the "villains" of the story, Phips is rarely, if ever, singled out as the individual who should *personally* be held responsible for what happened at Salem. Finally, the individual whose *apologia* has been singled out more often than any other is that of Samuel Sewall. Although his admission of guilt has made him a

frequent target for blame, his use of mortification and apology have also set him apart from the other rhetors examined in this chapter. Indeed, both his peers and contemporary scholars have judged his remorse as entirely sincere.

Finally, my analysis of how twentieth and twenty-first century rhetors have represented the trials in popular culture artifacts was grounded within the work done by scholars in the field of public memory. Before drawing conclusions in this area, I examined more than thirty-five different artifacts representing the genres of television, film, literature, and theater that have been crafted during the past sixty years. More specifically, I analyzed Arthur Miller's Broadway play *The Crucible* (1952), selected episodes from the television show *Bewitched* (1970), selected issues of *Marvel Team-Up* (1976), Disney's film *Hocus Pocus* (1993), a comedy sketch from *Saturday Night Live* (1993), the film adaptation of Miller's play *The Crucible* (1996), an episode of the television show *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (1997), a Halloween episode of *The Simpsons* (1997), two selected episodes of the television show *Charmed* (1998 & 2000), one episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1999), J.K. Rowling's novel *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), an episode of *The West Wing* (2001), Sony Pictures' film *The Covenant* (2006), the first season of the television show *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2010), an episode of the reality television program *So You Think You Can Dance* (2009), and Katherine Howe's novel *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane* (2009).

My review of the scholarship in the field of public memory highlighted seven conclusions about this topic that had special bearing on my work in this chapter. First, I

underscored the idea that public memory cannot and should not be equated with history. Additionally, I noted that memories are crafted by groups, and because of the nature of such groups, their recollections often fluctuate. And, just as the narrative form was key to understanding the power of constitutive discourse in Chapter II, I also highlighted the ways in which the narrative offers a unique source of power for public memory, illustrated how these memories are often uniquely tied to physical spaces, and supported one of the main goals of this chapter by arguing that public memory can and should be used to inform the present and the future. Finally, I reviewed two different systems by which scholars have classified public memories, to underscore my rationale for relying on Browne's divisions of "official" and "vernacular" to organize my own analysis of the contemporary public memory of Salem's witchcraft crisis.¹⁰

In order to understand how our "official" and "vernacular" memories of the trials differ, I began this portion of the chapter with a brief review of the official channels through which contemporary Americans typically remember the trials. A majority of this time was spent reviewing eight different public school history textbooks through which thousands of young adults learn about the trials each year.¹¹ This review highlighted three of the major problems which are often created when we rely on this avenue for the dissemination of memory for a majority of our knowledge about what took place at Salem during 1692: the information is generally brief, oversimplified, and inaccurate.

I divided my analysis of our "vernacular" memory of the trials into my responses to two questions: *how* do we remember Salem, and *why* do we remember Salem in

contemporary popular culture. Because these artifacts are all essentially narratives, I relied on Bormann's theoretical discussion of fantasy themes to frame my analysis of the first of these two questions. In doing so, I looked at unique facets of the characters, settings, and actions within these artifacts to gain a deeper understanding of how contemporary rhetors have crafted their stories to contribute to the public memory of the witchcraft crisis. Within my examination of the characters, I highlighted the theme of ancestry that ran through a majority of these artifacts. By capitalizing on this unique facet of history, the rhetors responsible for creating these pieces of pop culture were able to make a logical connection between their modern characters and the historical events that took place centuries ago. Additionally, I argued that these rhetors have undoubtedly built upon the stereotypical elements of setting that most modern Americans associate with the Puritans living in Salem Village during the trials. This reliance on the elements of setting not only helped them associate modern storylines with what took place in 1692, but it has also allowed them to effectively cement Salem as the physical site for references to witchcraft within contemporary America. Finally, I isolated time travel as one of the most common action themes seen across this set of artifacts, and concluded that this plotline was often used to help modern witches connect with their heritage and gain greater knowledge and power, but also to prove that human nature cannot be changed, even by going back into the past, armed with knowledge gained from the future.

My analysis of *why* contemporary public memory has remembered Salem revealed three conclusions: that these memories are used to remember the woman as witch, to offer

an explanation for what “really” took place in 1692, and to develop the theme of the “witch hunt.” Ultimately, this analysis supported DeRosa’s argument from his own analysis of fictional account of the trials, that “whether it be the dichotomy between the spectral and the real, witches and witch hunters, or the powerful witch and the powerless ‘witch,’ all of these plays, films, and television shows wrestle with the contradictory nature of the rhetorical category of ‘witch.’”¹²

And so we have returned to some of the questions that I posed in the beginning of this investigation and that have been asked in countless studies of both the Salem witchcraft crisis and the topic of witches in general. Why are the events of the trials such a vivid and recurring aspect of our American cultural identity? What does it mean to classify someone as a “witch?” And how can a deeper understanding of these ideas and an appreciation and awareness of what took place at Salem impact our worldview in the twenty-first century? The quotations selected as epigraphs for this final chapter offer some interesting insight into these issues. Perhaps, as Howe suggests, there is simply something fascinating about what took place at Salem. And although I would argue that there is certainly some truth to this explanation, understanding the reality of the witchcraft trials has much greater value for contemporary Americans than mere entertainment alone. Indeed, Upham makes a valuable point when he contends “that no duty is more certain, none more important, than a free and fearless expression of opinion, by all persons, on all occasions.”¹³ As I have previously illustrated, the idea of learning from mistakes made in the past is an integral part of responsible decision making for any group.

However, there is also specific value in studying these issues from a rhetorical perspective. When viewing the “big picture” of this project, it is easy to see that although there was only *one* historical event, rhetoric has been used to explain, construct, remember, and reframe that single occurrence in a wide variety of ways over the past three hundred years. DeRosa argues that this is possible because “Salem is, in actuality, an object of itself, produced by the very ‘truths’ that it purports to generate and reveal. Salem past is not so much the blueprint for Salem present as it is a backward-looking reflection of a constantly updated present moment.”¹⁴ Thus, the lens of rhetorical analysis provides a way to examine and understand how individuals, both in the seventeenth century and today, have engaged in the act of updating their reflections about this aspect of American history. And as long as female politicians are mocked for “cackling,” and writers and producers continue to weave these historical and satirical themes into their artifacts, we are likely to continue reexamining and reconstructing our past for both the entertainment and edification of our present.

Notes

1. Katherine Howe, *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2009), 141.
2. Charles W. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft: With an Account of Salem Village and A History of Opinions on Witchcraft and Kindred Subjects, Volume II* (Boston, MA: Wiggin and Lunt, 1867), 438.
3. James Arnt Aune, “Witchcraft as Symbolic Action in Early Modern Europe and America,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 765-99.
4. Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose, Third Edition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 36.
5. John Higginson, introduction to *A Modest Inquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft Second Edition*, by John Hale (Boston, MA: Kneeland and Adams, 1771), 6.
6. Howe, *The Physick Book of Deliverance Dane*, 363.
7. Halford Ross Ryan, “Kategoria and Apologia: On Their Rhetorical Criticism as a Speech Set,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982): 254-61.

8. Thomas Brattle, F.R.S. to Unknown, 8 October 1692, 183.

9. Ibid., 186.

10. Stephen H. Browne, "Reading, Rhetoric, and the Texture of Public Memory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995): 245.

11. The textbooks examined were: James West Davidson, *The American Nation: Beginnings Through 1877* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003); Sterling Stuckey and Linda Kerrigan Salvucci, *Call to Freedom: Beginnings to 1877* (Austin, TX: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 2003); McDougal Littell, *Creating America: A History of the United States – Beginnings through Reconstruction* (Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell, 2003); John Mack Faragher, Mari Jo Buhle, Daniel Czitrom, and Susan H. Armitage, *Out of Many: A History of the American People, Advanced Placement Edition* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2002); James L. Roark, Michael P. Johnson, Patricia Cline Cohen, Sarah Stage, Alan Lawson, and Susan M. Hartmann, *The American Promise: A History of the United States* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002); Robert A. Divine, T. H. Breen, George M. Fredrickson, and R. Hal Williams, *America: Past and Present, AP Edition* (New York, NY: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, Inc., 2003); John M. Murrin, Paul E. Johnson, James M. McPherson, Gary Gerstle, Emily S. Rosenberg, and Norman L. Rosenberg, *Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 2002); and Andrew Cayton, Elisabeth Israels Perry, Linda Reed, and Allan M. Winkler, *America: Pathways to the Present – Modern American History* (Needham, MA: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004).

12. Robin DeRosa, *The Making of Salem: The Witch Trials in History, Fiction and Tourism* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2009), 150.

13. Upham, *Salem Witchcraft*, 438.

14. DeRosa, *The Making of Salem*, 186.

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- . Episode 7-06, "Paul Revere Rides Again." First broadcast October 19, 1970 by ABC. Directed by Richard Michaels and written by Henry Sharp and Phil Sharp.
- . Episode no. 7-07, "Samantha's Bad Day in Salem." First broadcast November 5, 1970 by ABC. Directed by Richard Michaels and written by Ed Jurist.
- . Episode no. 7-08, "Samantha's Old Salem Trip." First broadcast November 12, 1970 by ABC. Directed by Richard Michaels and written by Ed Jurist.
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